

## M.S.SUBBULAKSHMI

M. S. Subbulakshmi was born to sing. Her unchallenged position in the realm of Carnatic music was the result of great talent combined with hours of practice and utter devotion.

Subbulakshmi began her formal training in music when she was five. Her first stage performance was at the age of eight. It is said that the young Subbulakshmi would practice her ragas even between household chores, keeping time to the most intricate and complex beats of Carnatic music.

M. S. Subbulakshmi used music as an instrument to motivate people, especially during the freedom movement. Her music inspired all those who heard it, and she was celebrated and acclaimed wherever she went.

In this graphic biography, Amar Chitra Katha pays tribute to the legend and her invaluable contribution to the world of music.

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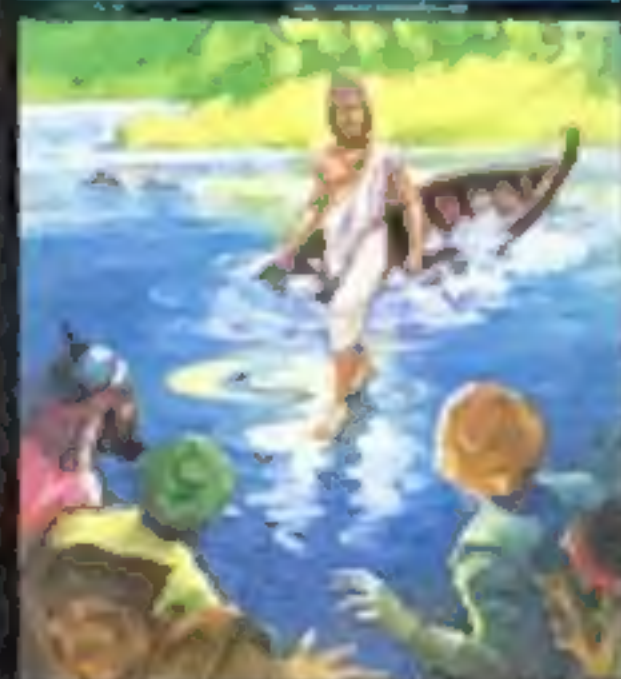
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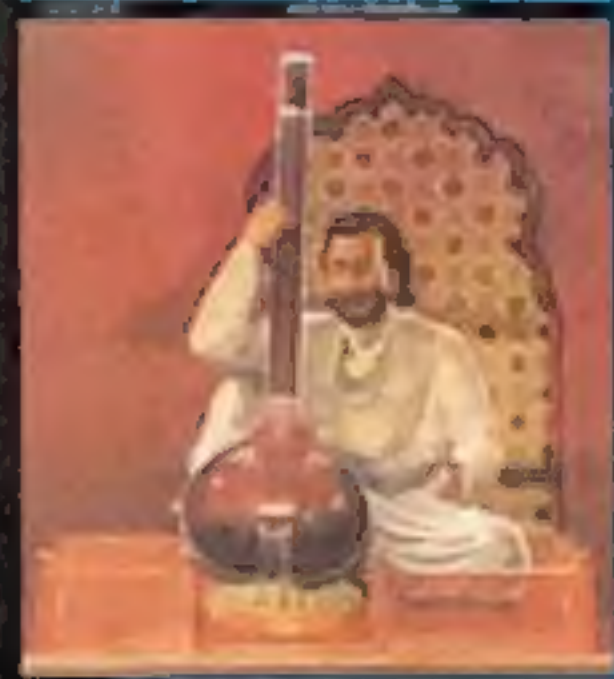
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"Amar Chitra Kathas are a glorious tribute to India's rich cultural heritage. These books have been an integral part of my children's early years, as they have been for many other families across India. Comics are a great way of reaching out to children, inculcating reading habits and driving their quest to learn more about our roots."

- NARAYAN MURTHY, CHIEF MENTOR, INFOSYS

## VISIONARIES



# M.S.SUBBULAKSHMI

QUEEN OF CARNATIC MUSIC

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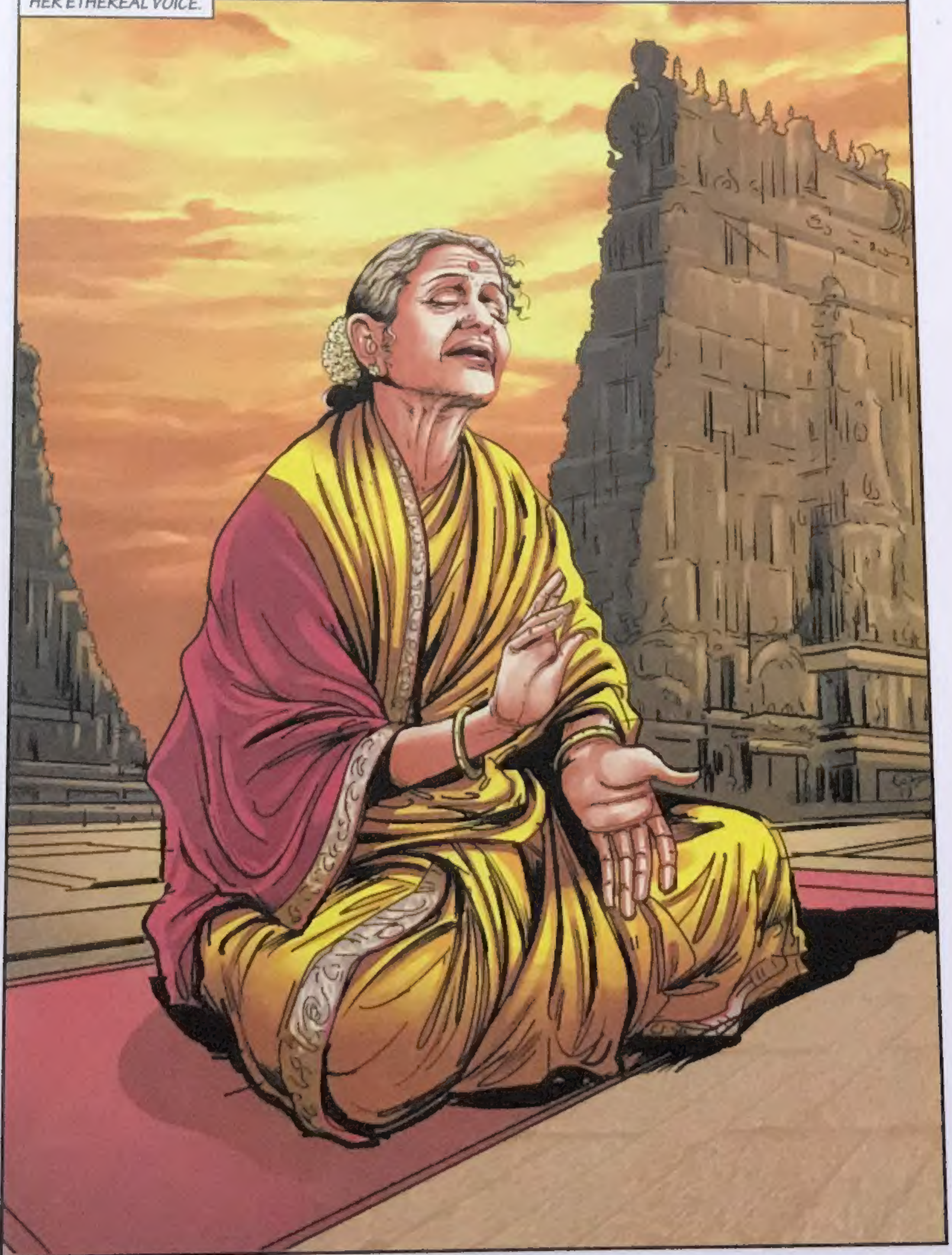


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## M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI

MADURAI IN TAMIL NADU, ALSO KNOWN AS MADHURAPURI, IS HOME TO TWO GODDESSES - MEENAKSHI AMMAN AND MADURAI SHANMUKHAVADIYU SUBBULAKSHMI - ONE KNOWN FOR HER ETHEREAL BEAUTY AND ONE FOR HER ETHEREAL VOICE.





BORN TO RENOWNED VEENA PLAYER SHANMUKHAVADIVU, ON SEPTEMBER 16, 1916, SUBBULAKSHMI'S EARLY LIFE WAS STEEPED IN MUSIC.



THEIR SMALL HOUSE, ON HANUMANTHARAYAR KOIL STREET, PROVIDED THE PERFECT SETTING AS SHANMUKHAVADIVU HOSTED MANY MUSIC SESSIONS THERE.

SHE WAS ALSO AN ATTENTIVE AND STRICT MOTHER.



KUNJA OR KUNJAMMA, MEANING 'LITTLE ONE', WAS SUBBULAKSHMI'S NICKNAME.



\*MUSICAL VOWELS  
\*\* AN INSTRUMENT USED TO KEEP THE PITCH

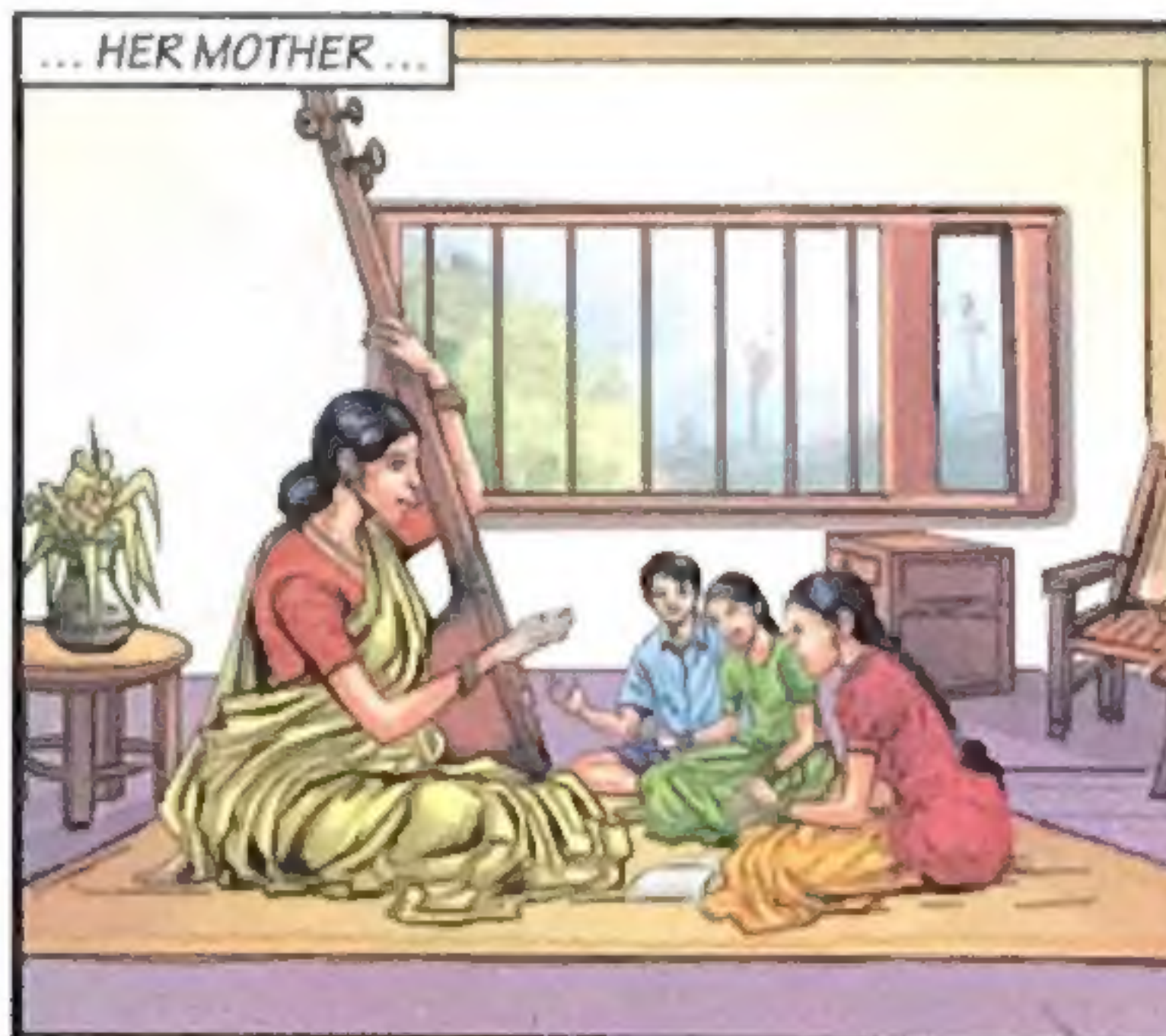
SHE CHOSE SRINIVASA IYENGAR AS HER DAUGHTER'S MUSIC TEACHER.



WHILE LIFE IN THE SHANMUKHAVADIVU HOUSEHOLD WAS FRUGAL...



... MUSIC WAS NOT. APART FROM SRINIVASA IYENGAR, KUNJA HAD MANY TEACHERS INCLUDING WANDERING BARDS ...





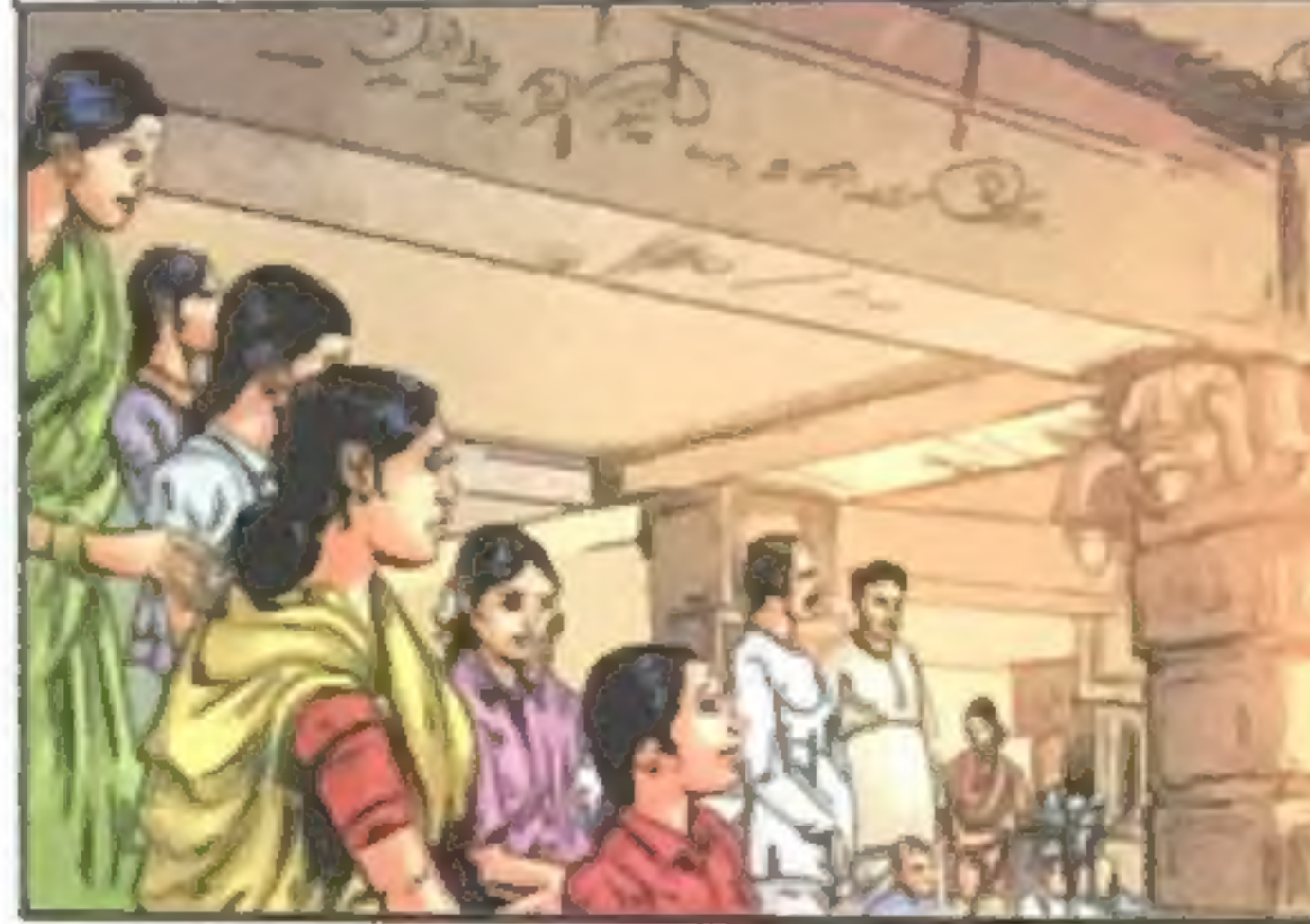
INSTEAD OF THE CINEMA, KUNJA AND HER SIBLINGS WERE TAKEN TO SEE HARIKATHA\* PERFORMANCES.



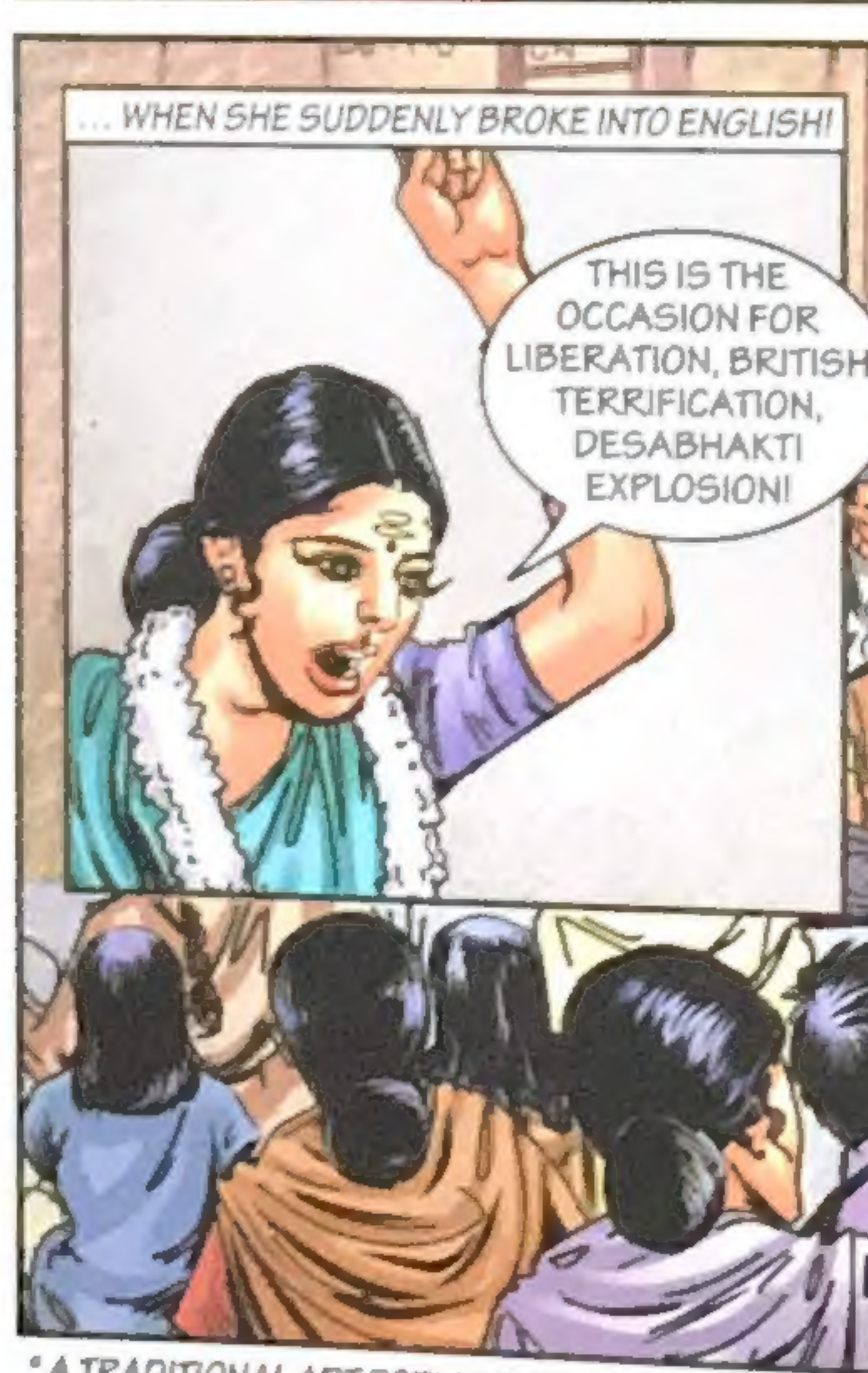
ONE DAY, THE PERFORMANCE WAS BY SARASWATI BAI, A DEVOTED FOLLOWER OF MAHATMA GANDHI AND AN INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS SUPPORTER.



SHE WAS RECITING THE RAMAYANA WITH FERVOUR...



SA TU RAMASYA  
DHARMATMA NIPATTA  
VIBHISHANA\*\*...



THIS IS THE  
OCCASION FOR  
LIBERATION, BRITISH  
TERRIFICATION,  
DESABHAKTI  
EXPLOSION!

HA HA  
HA HA!

SHH!  
KUNJA!

\* A TRADITIONAL ART FORM COMBINING MUSIC, DANCE AND STORYTELLING

\*\* AND SO THE VIRTUOUS VIBHISHANA ALIGHTED NEAR RAMA.

KUNJA'S MUSIC LESSONS CONTINUED FOR OVER A YEAR.



LET'S  
PRACTISE  
THIS VARNAM\*  
AGAIN.

ONE DAY -



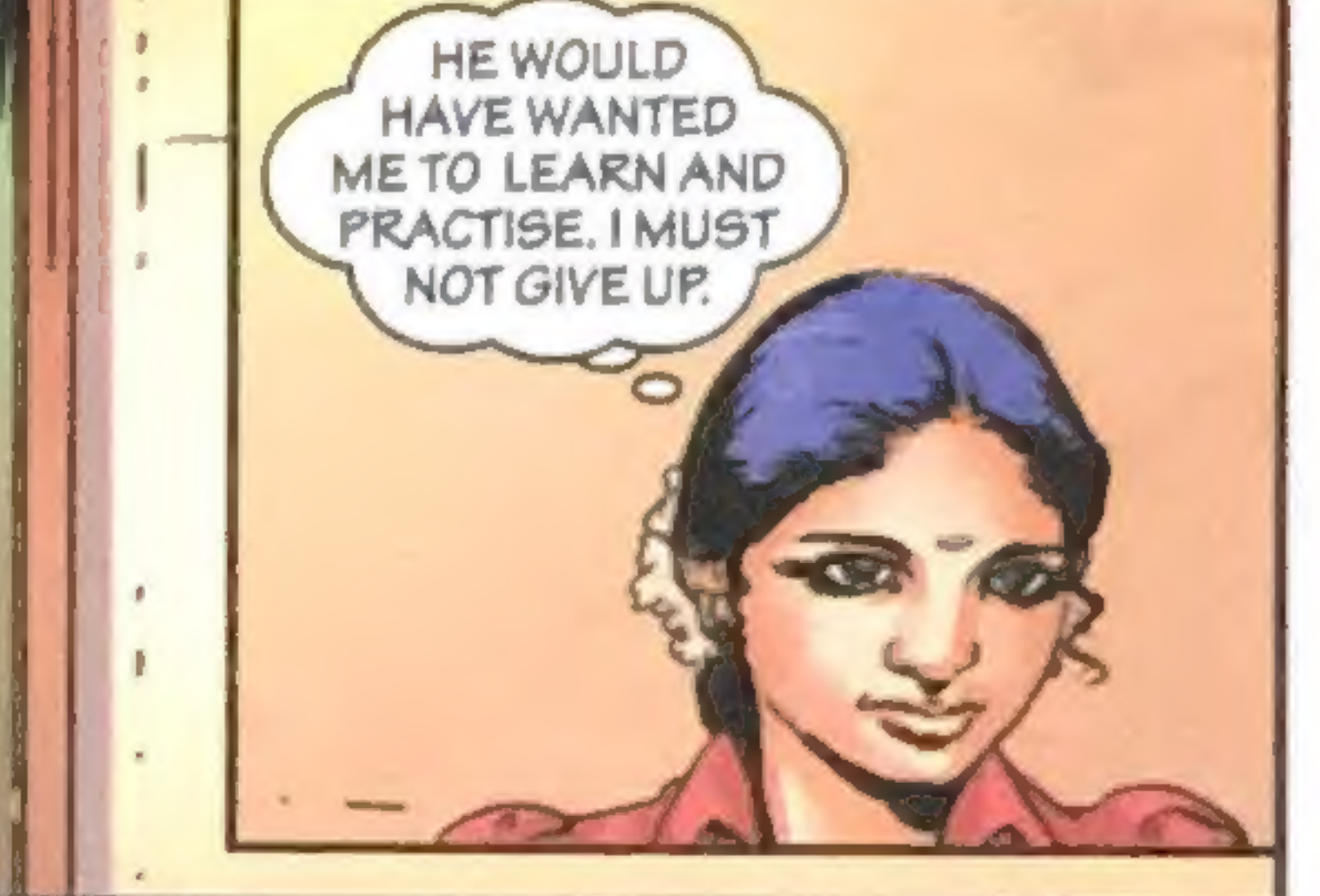
KUNJA, I HAVE TO  
VISIT MY HOMETOWN  
BUT I WILL COME BACK  
SOON. YOU MUST KEEP  
PRACTISING ON  
YOUR OWN.

BUT -



SRINIVASA  
IYENGAR IS NO  
MORE.

OH!



HE WOULD  
HAVE WANTED  
ME TO LEARN AND  
PRACTISE. I MUST  
NOT GIVE UP.

AND SO, EARLY EVERY MORNING...



THE PITCH  
MATCHES THE  
TAMBURA, AND  
NOW I MUST SING  
WITHOUT IT.

...AND SEVERAL TIMES IN A DAY BETWEEN HER CHORES...

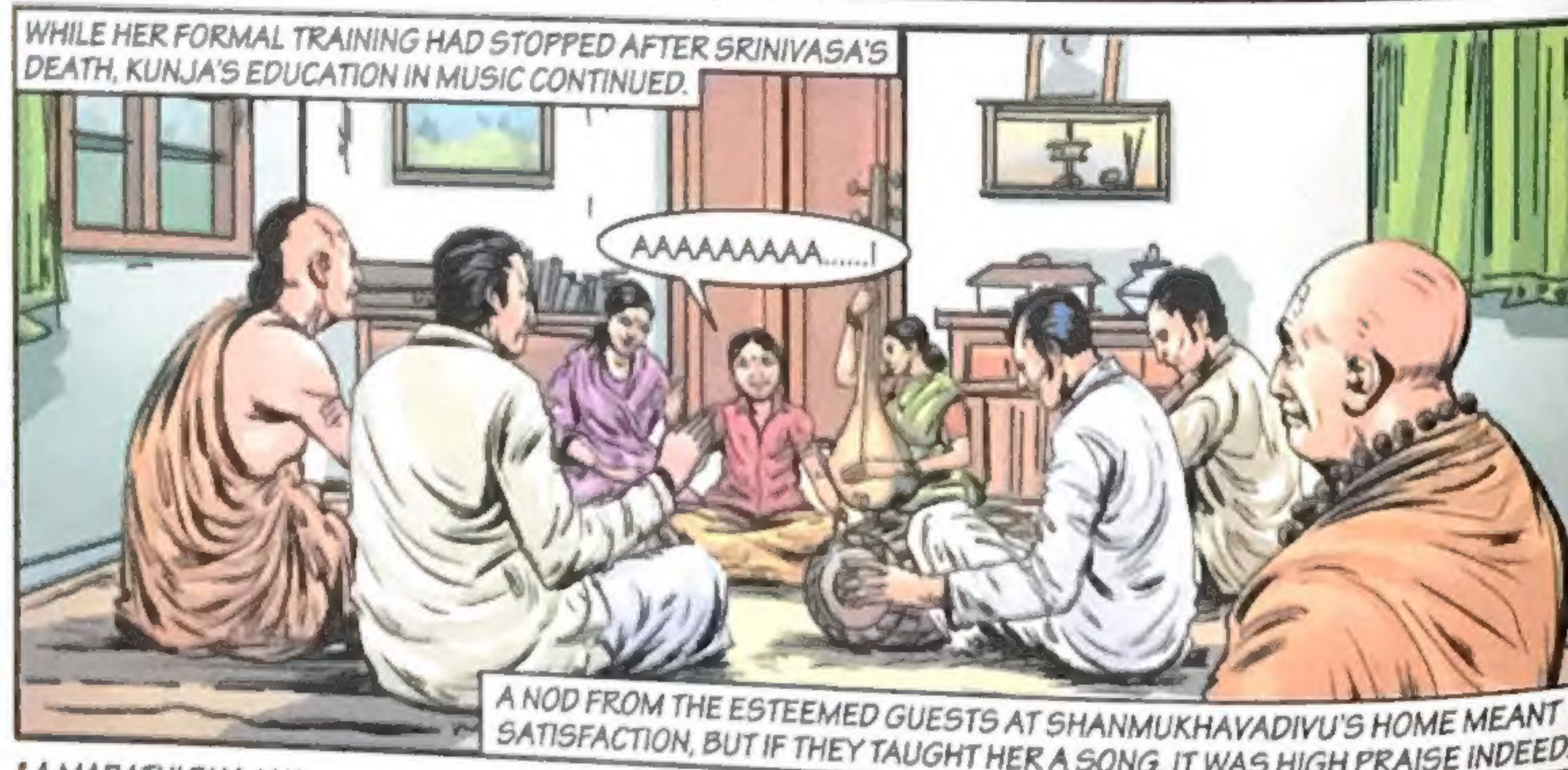
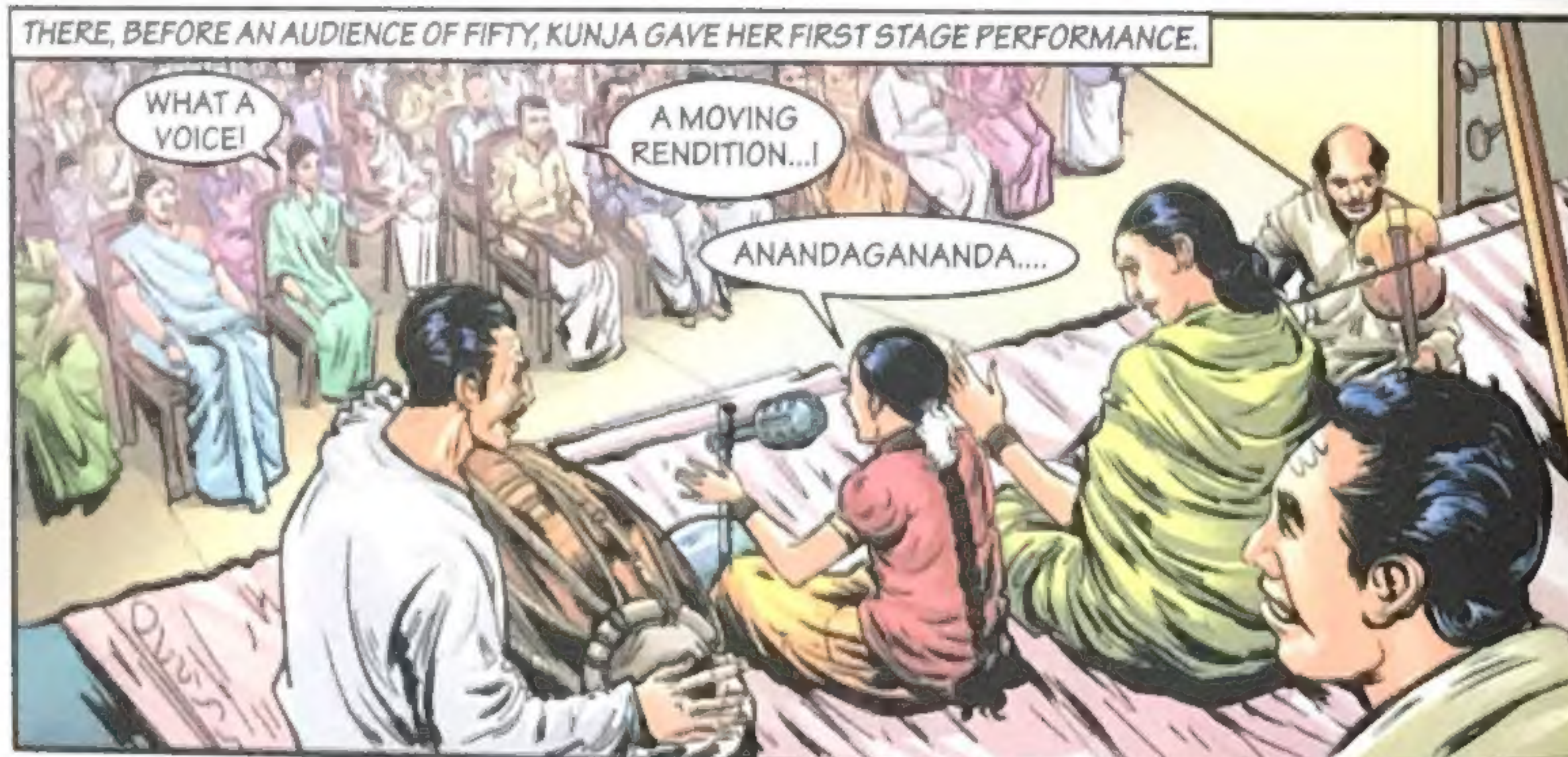
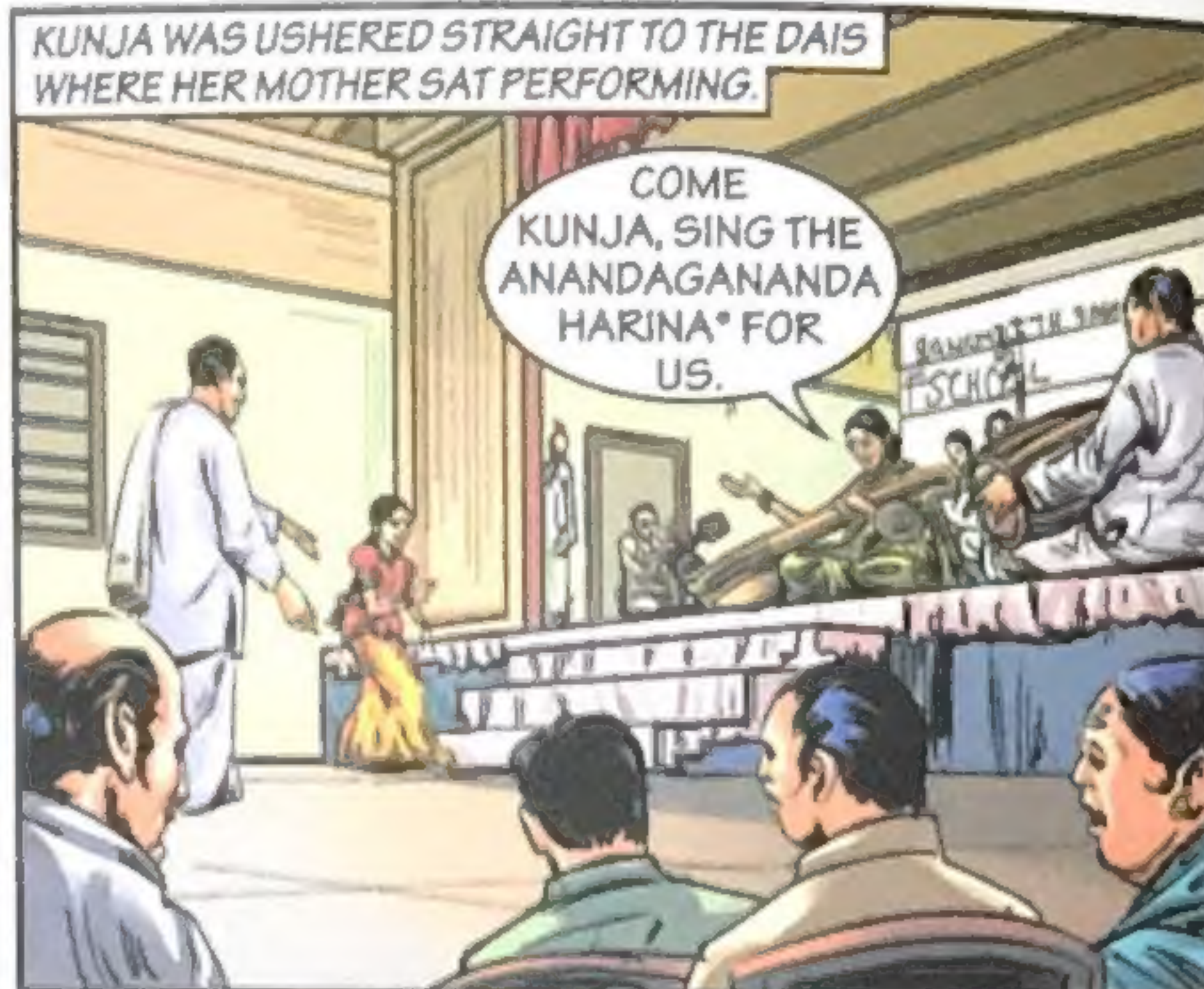


I SHOULD  
BE ABLE TO GET  
THE CORRECT PITCH  
WITHOUT MY  
TAMBURA.

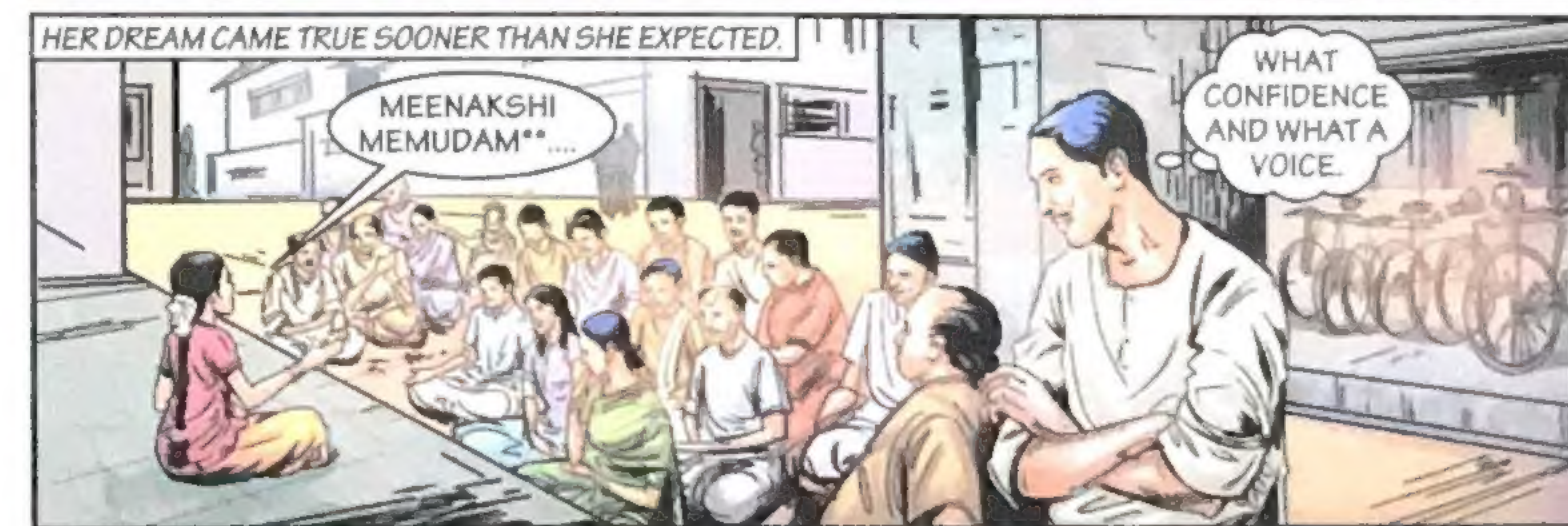
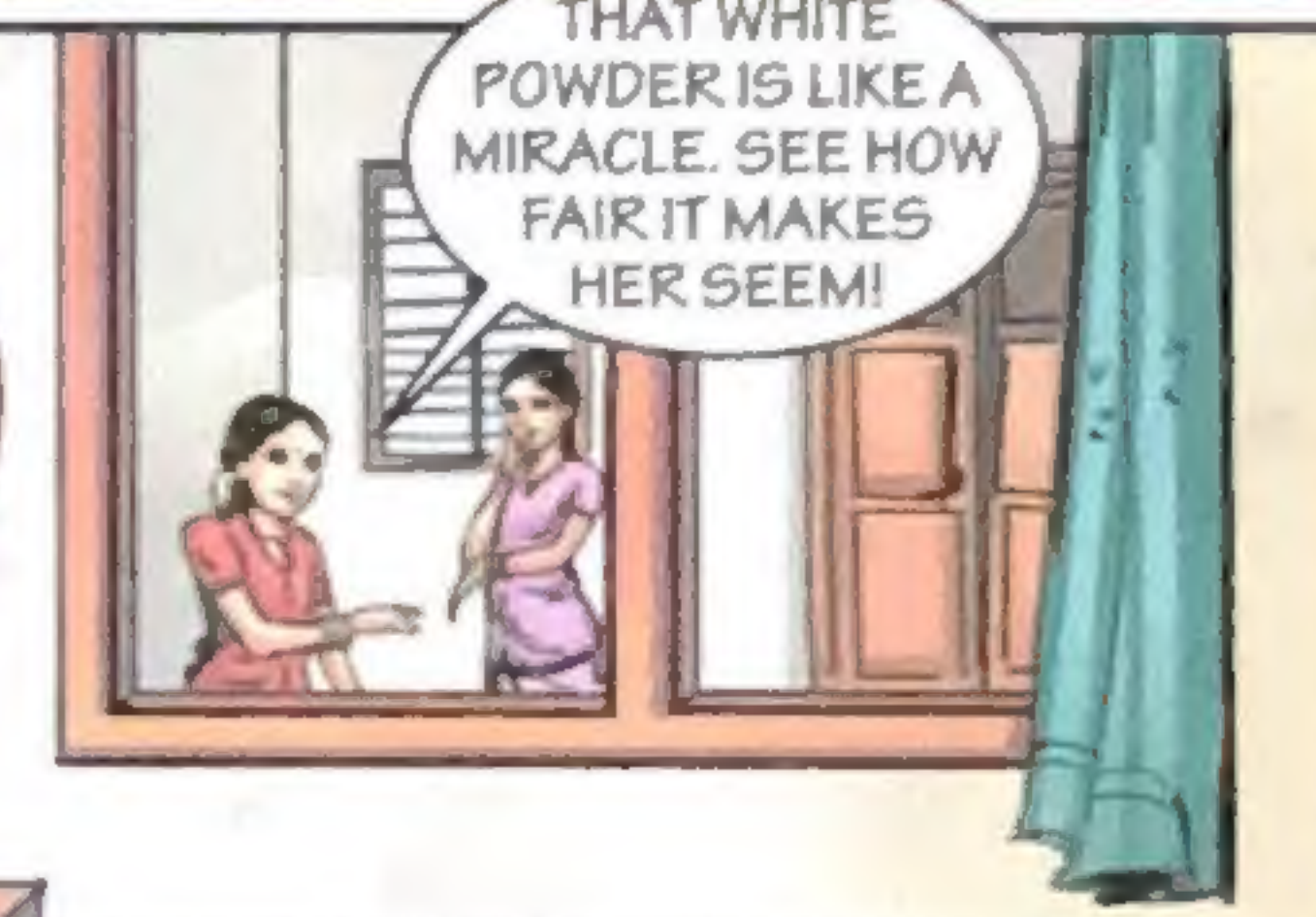
...KUNJA WOULD PRACTISE HER MUSIC.

\* TRADITIONALLY, CARNATIC MUSIC RECITALS BEGIN WITH A LONG, COMPLEX SONG, A VARNAM.





\* A MARATHI BHAJAN

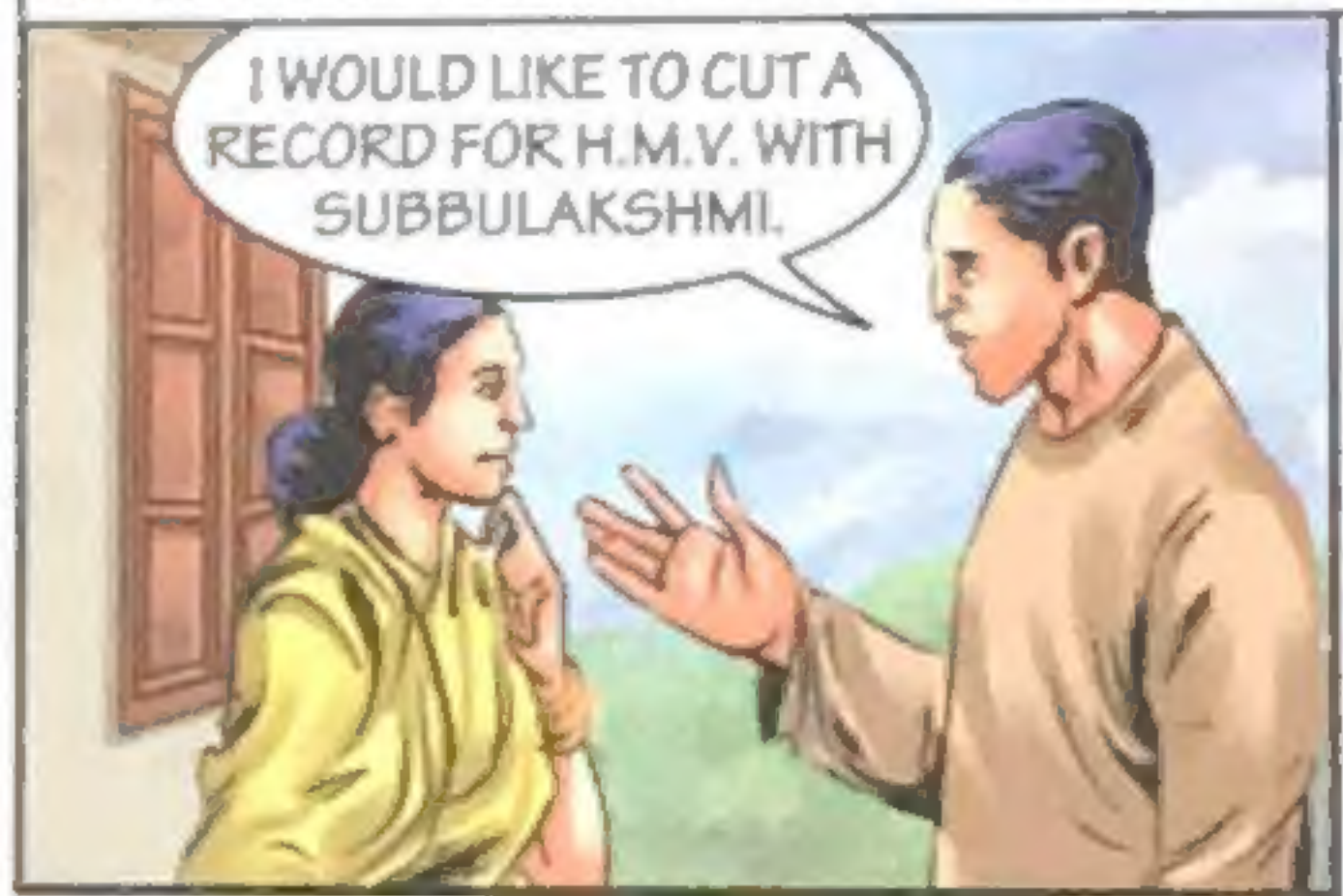


\* A BHAJAN BY TULSIDAS

\*\* A KRITI OR DEVOTIONAL SONG BY MUTHUSWAMI DIKSHITAR



THE MAN WAS A TALENT SPOTTER WITH H.M.V. AND IMMEDIATELY APPROACHED SHANMUKHAVADIVU.



I WOULD LIKE TO CUT A RECORD FOR H.M.V. WITH SUBBULAKSHMI.

AT THE AGE OF 10, KUNJA OR SUBBULAKSHMI RECORDED HER FIRST SONG, MARAKATA VADIVU^ WITH H.M.V.



THIS CHILD HAS SUCH A CAPTIVATING VOICE!

IN FEBRUARY 1929, THE AUDIENCE AT A CONCERT WAS EXTREMELY AGITATED -

WE CAME TO SEE NOTED VEENA PLAYER TIRUCHENDUR SHANMUKHAVADIVU AND YOU HAVE A CHILD PERFORMING!



BUT ....

Madurai Subbulakshmi With Veenai Shanmukhavadiyu

CALMLY, SUBBULAKSHMI BEGAN TO SING ACCOMPANIED BY HER MOTHER. SOON -



SHABAASHI

BESH\*\*

BALLE\*

AFTER THE CONCERT -



PLEASE ACCEPT THIS GIFT FROM ME.

Madurai Subbulakshmi With Shanmukhavadiyu

^ A TAMIL COMPOSITION IN PRAISE OF THE GODDESS MEENAKSHI

SUBBULAKSHMI'S FAME GREW AMONG AUDIENCES AND MUSICIANS ALIKE.



LISTEN TO THIS CHILD SING. HER MUSIC IS SO PURE.



THAT IS THE KIND OF MUSIC WHICH WILL LAST A LIFETIME!

IT WAS EXPERT PERCUSSIONIST, P. DAKSHINAMURTHY PILLAI, WHO LATER ACCOMPANIED SUBBULAKSHMI IN HER CONCERTS.

ONE DAY -



NOTED HINDUSTANI VOCALIST, PANDIT NARAYANRAO VYAS IS SINGING IN MADURAI. I WISH I COULD GO.

NARAYAN VYAS

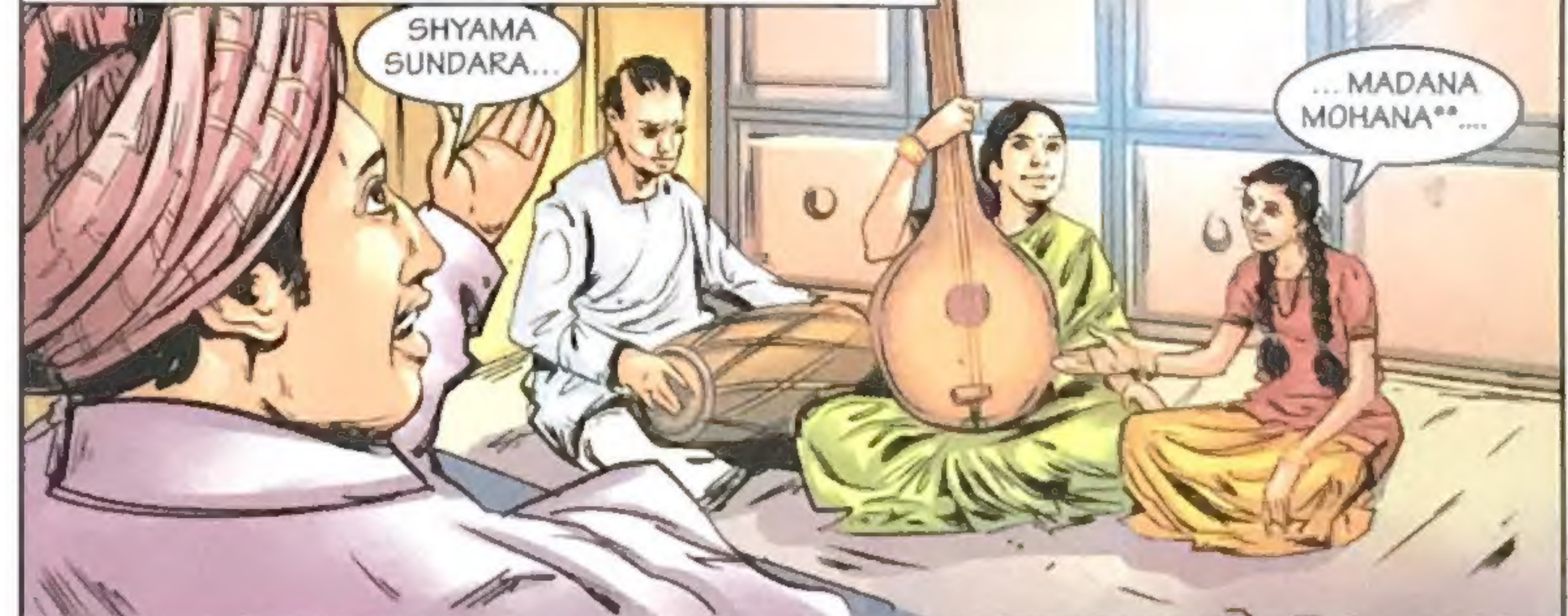
BUT THE MAESTRO HAD HEARD OF SUBBULAKSHMI AND CAME TO MEET HER.



I HAVE COME TO HEAR YOU SING.

WE ARE HONOURED!

SUBBULAKSHMI'S VOICE INSPIRED VYAS TO TEACH HER A THUMRI\*.



SHYAMA SUNDARA...

... MADANA MOHANA\*\* .....

\* A KIND OF SEMI-CLASSICAL MUSIC  
\*\* A SONG SUNG IN PRAISE OF KRISHNA



SUBBULAKSHMI WAS FAMOUS.



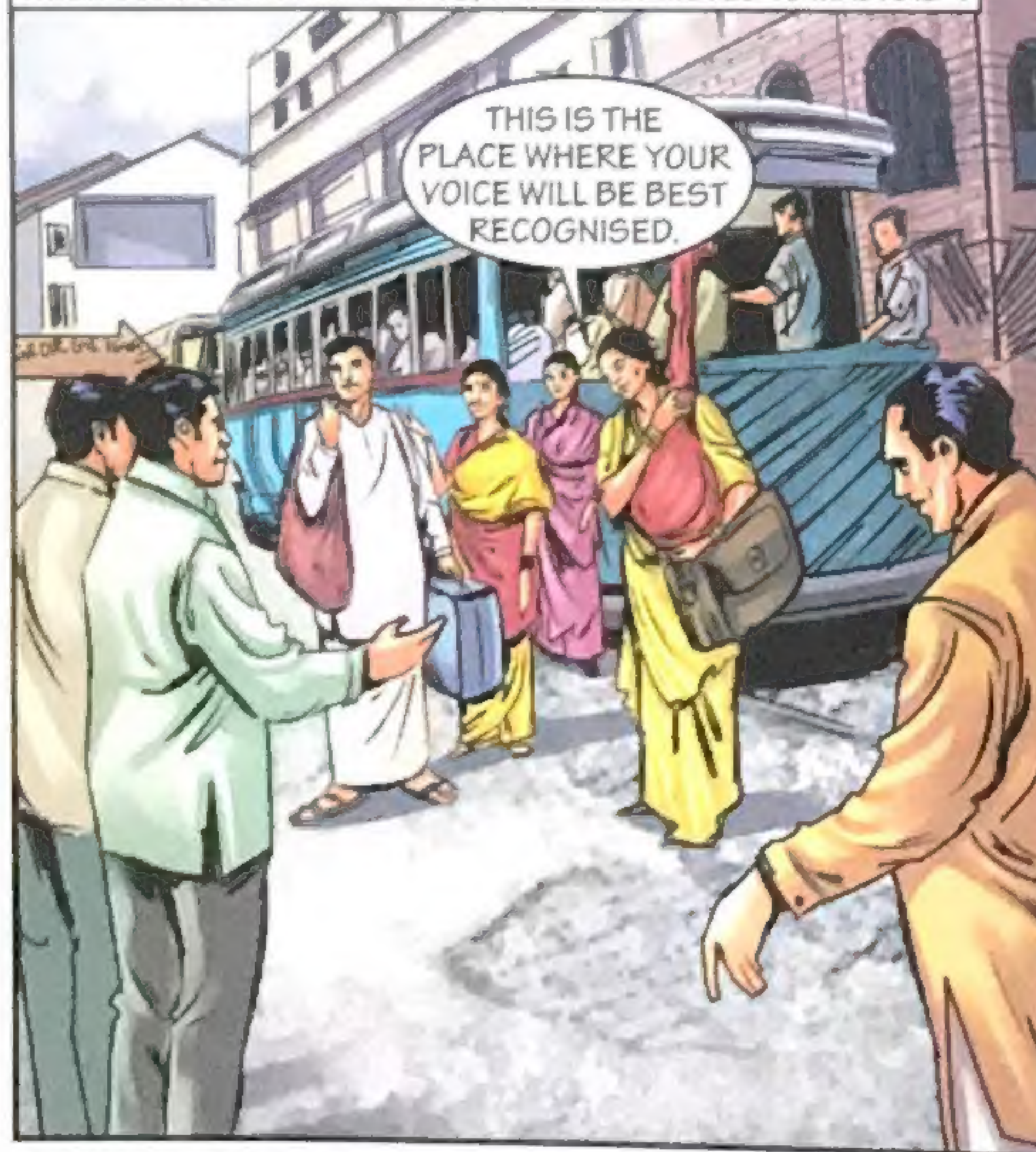
HER RECORDS SOLD BRISKLY.



SHANMUKHAVADIVU HAD PLANS FOR HER TALENTED DAUGHTER.



WHEN SUBBULAKSHMI WAS 15, THE FAMILY MOVED TO MADRAS^.



THE MOVE COINCIDED WITH THE KUMBAKONAM\*\* MAHAMAHAM.



\*AT THAT TIME ARTISTES WERE SUPPORTED BY WEALTHY MEN.

\*\*A TEMPLE TOWN IN TAMIL NADU NEAR THANJAVUR

THE PREPARATIONS WERE BEING HANDLED BY A NEW FILM DIRECTOR, K. SUBRAMANYAM. HE WAS ALSO A NATIONALIST LAWYER AND A TALENT SPOTTER.



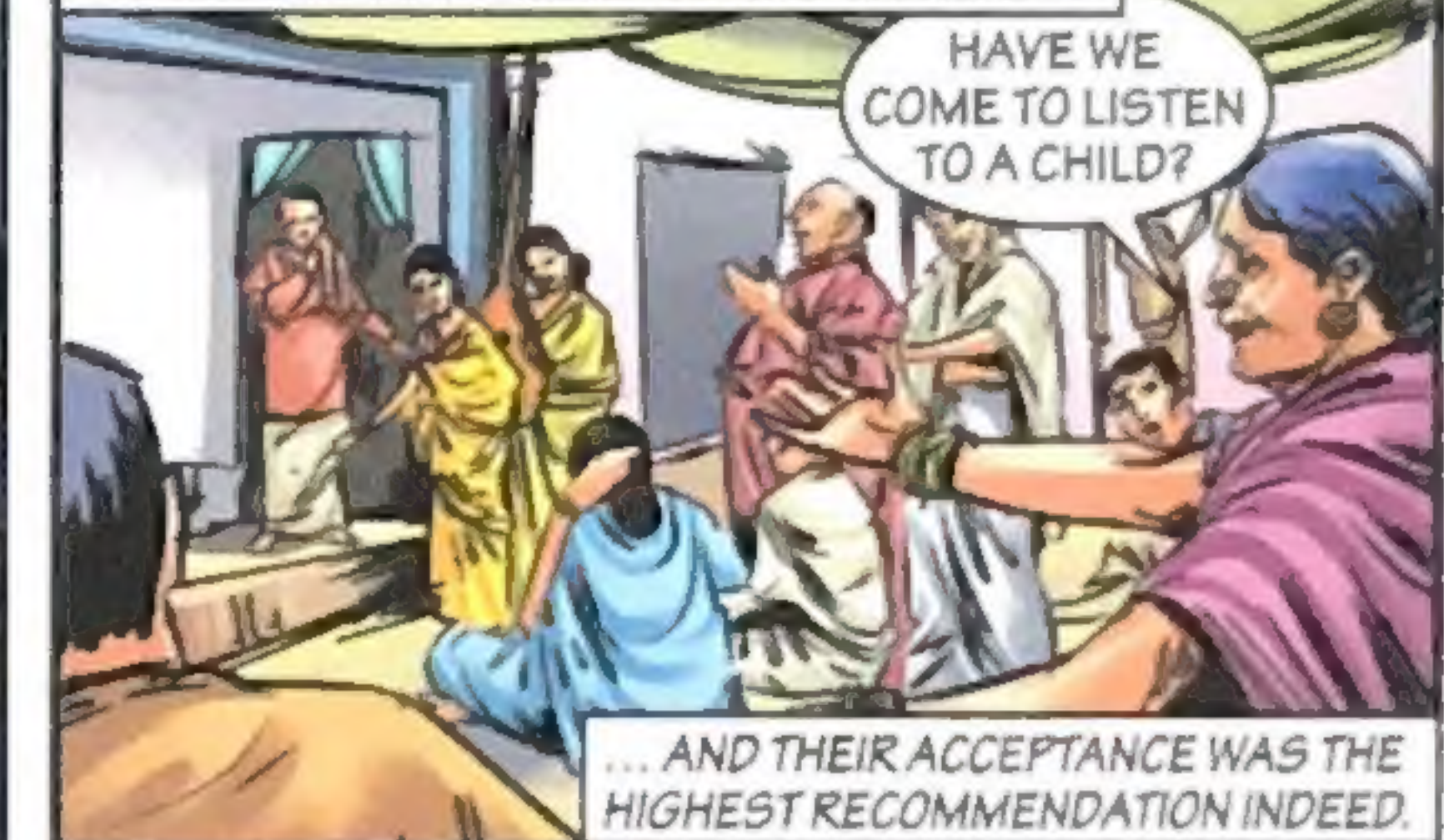
AND SO -



FINALLY, ONE AFTERNOON WHEN NOT MANY PEOPLE ATTENDED -



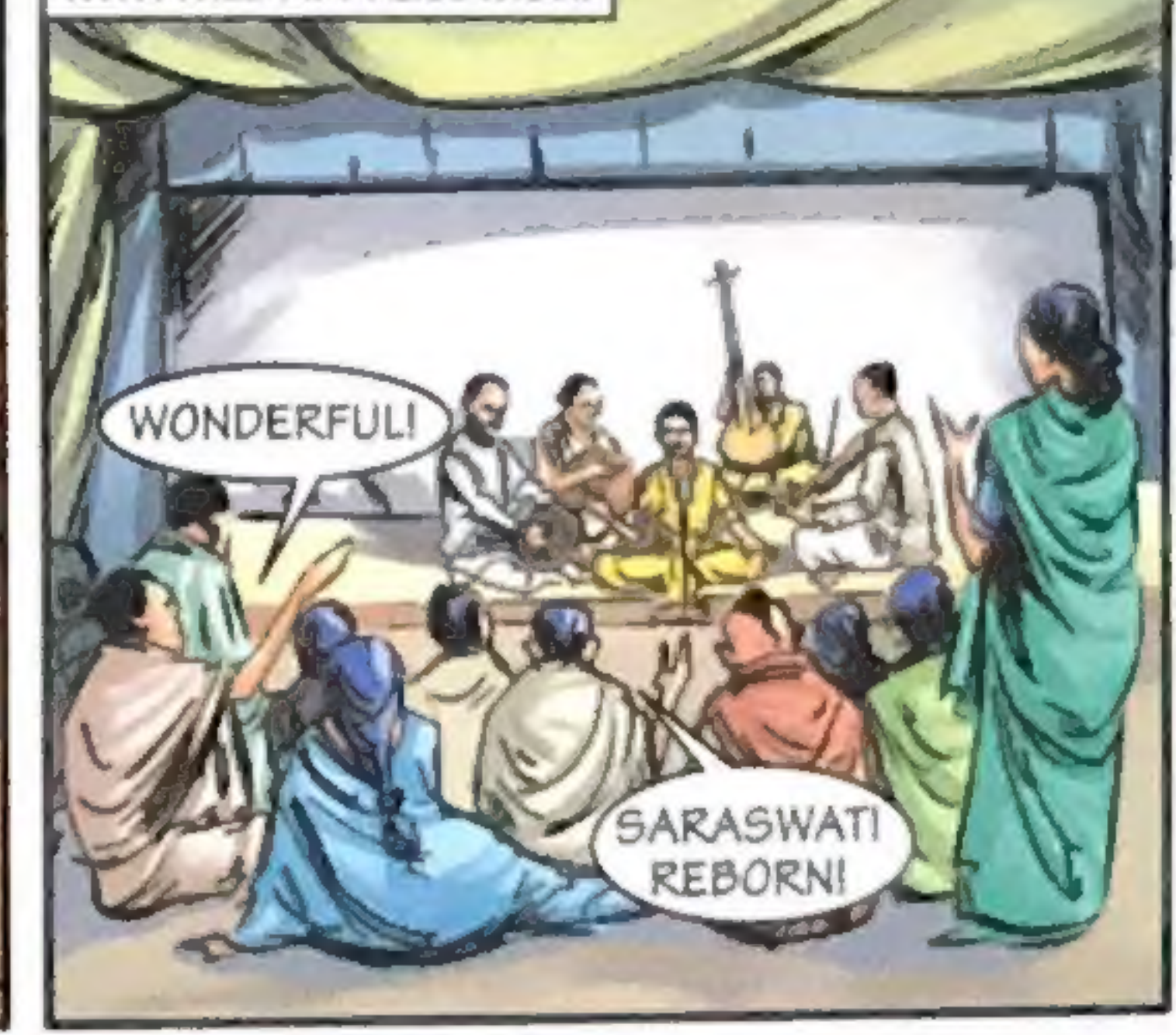
SUBRAMANYAM WAS JUSTIFIED IN HIS FEARS. THE MAHAMAHAM AUDIENCE WAS CRITICAL...



AS SUBBULAKSHMI BEGAN TO SING...

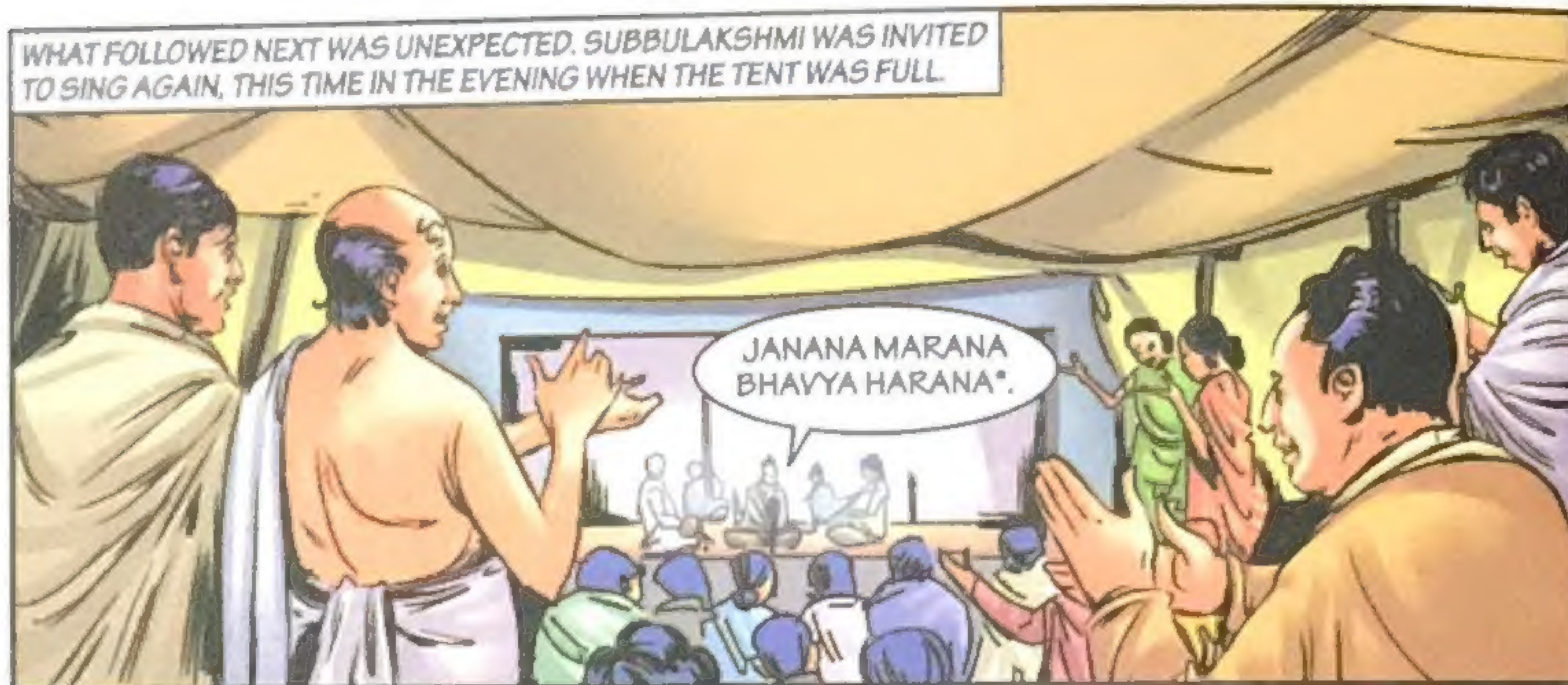


...THE USUALLY QUIET AUDIENCE RESPONDED WITH WILD APPRECIATION.





WHAT FOLLOWED NEXT WAS UNEXPECTED. SUBBULAKSHMI WAS INVITED TO SING AGAIN, THIS TIME IN THE EVENING WHEN THE TENT WAS FULL.



JANANA MARANA  
BHAYYA HARANA\*.

K. SUBRAMANYAM HAD ONCE AGAIN MADE A DISCOVERY!



WHAT A VOICE!  
WHAT ASSURANCE!  
I WONDER, WILL SHE  
MAKE A GOOD  
ACTRESS?

SUBRAMANYAM WAS NOT THE ONLY ONE WHO DISCOVERED SUBBULAKSHMI THAT DAY.



HER VOICE  
CAPTIVATES  
ME.

34-YEAR-OLD THYAGARAJA SADASHIVAM WAS A PATRIOT AND KHADI ACTIVIST, WHO FELL IN LOVE WITH SUBBULAKSHMI'S VOICE.



ON JANUARY 1, 1932, AT THE MADRAS MUSIC ACADEMY -



ARIYAKUDI  
RAMANUJA IYENGAR\*\*  
HAS CANCELLED HIS CONCERT  
AT THE LAST MINUTE!  
WHAT DO WE DO?

\* "FREE ME FROM FEAR OF BIRTH AND DEATH, SHELTER ME AT YOUR FEET," A MARATHI ABHANG

\*\* A FAMOUS VOCALIST



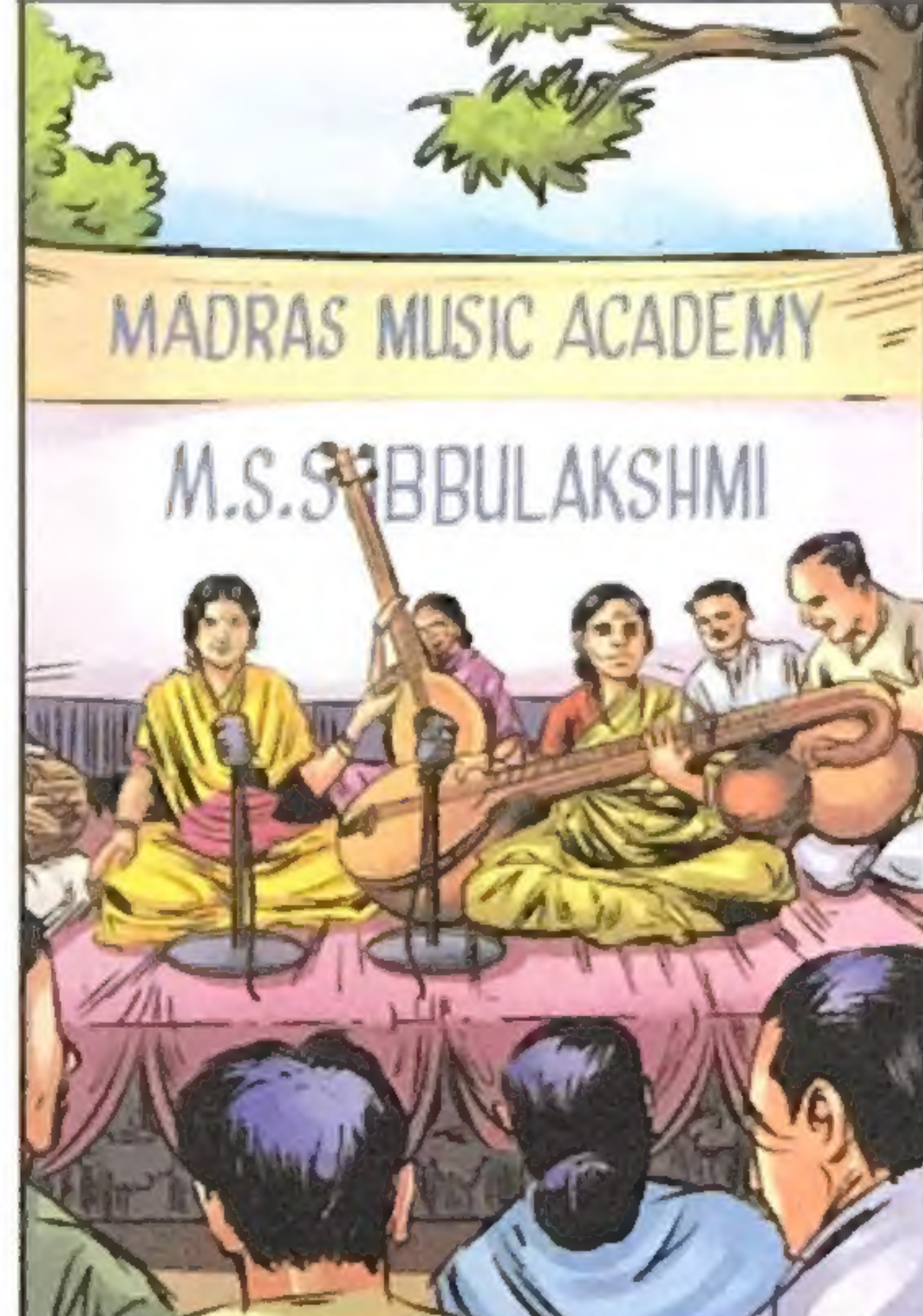
WHY DON'T YOU  
INVITE MADURAI SUBBULAKSHMI?  
HER SUCCESS AT THE MAHAMAHAM  
IS WELL KNOWN.



BUT SHE IS  
A WOMAN. IT IS  
UNHEARD OF!

SHE HAS  
CONQUERED EVERY  
STRONGHOLD OF MUSIC  
ACROSS THE STATE. WE  
MUST GIVE HER  
A CHANCE.

THE STAGE WAS SET AT MY LADY'S GARDEN, MADRAS.



MADRAS MUSIC ACADEMY

M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI

AT 16, M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI HAD BECOME THE FIRST WOMAN AND THE YOUNGEST PERFORMER AT THE PRESTIGIOUS ACADEMY!

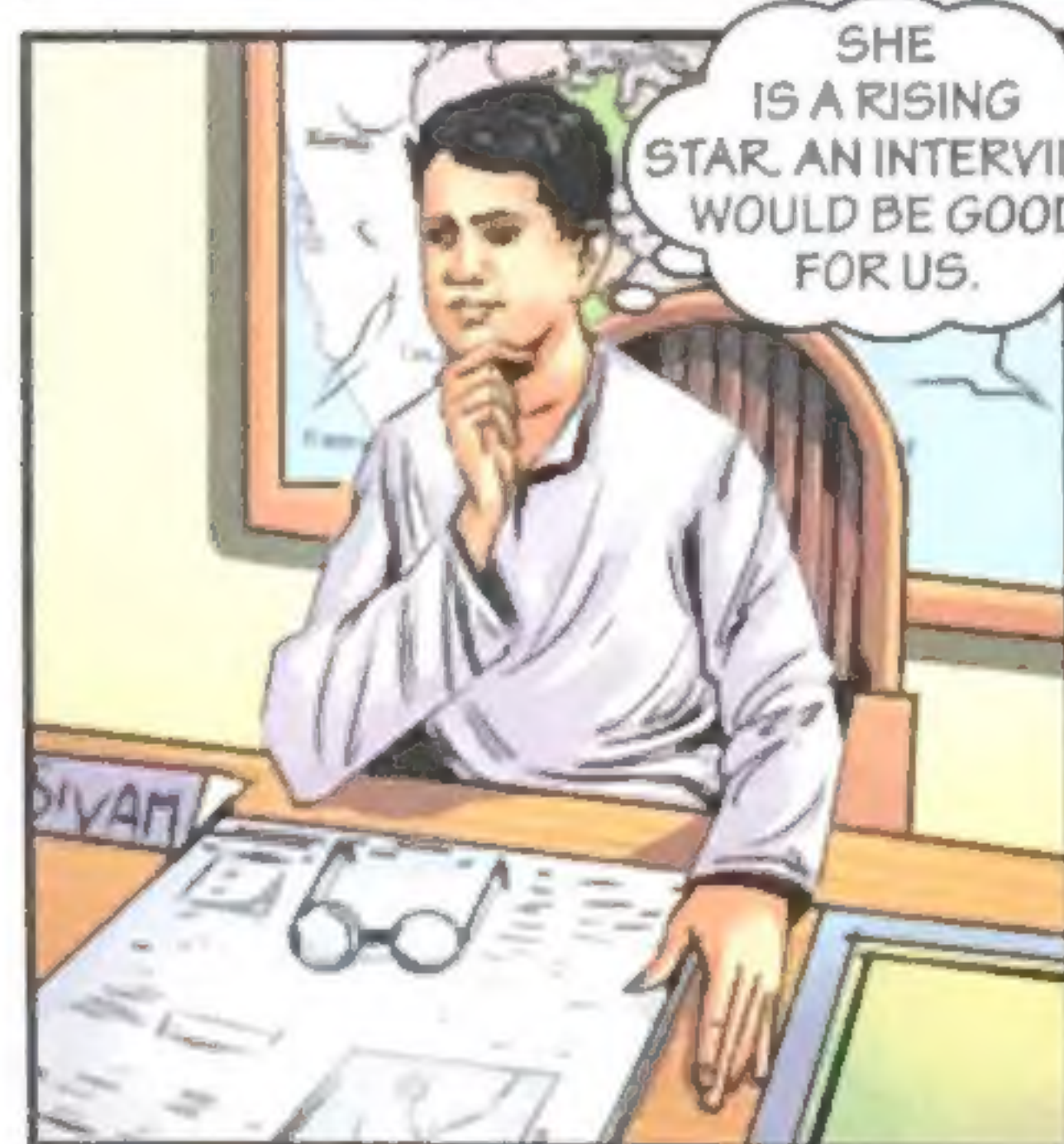
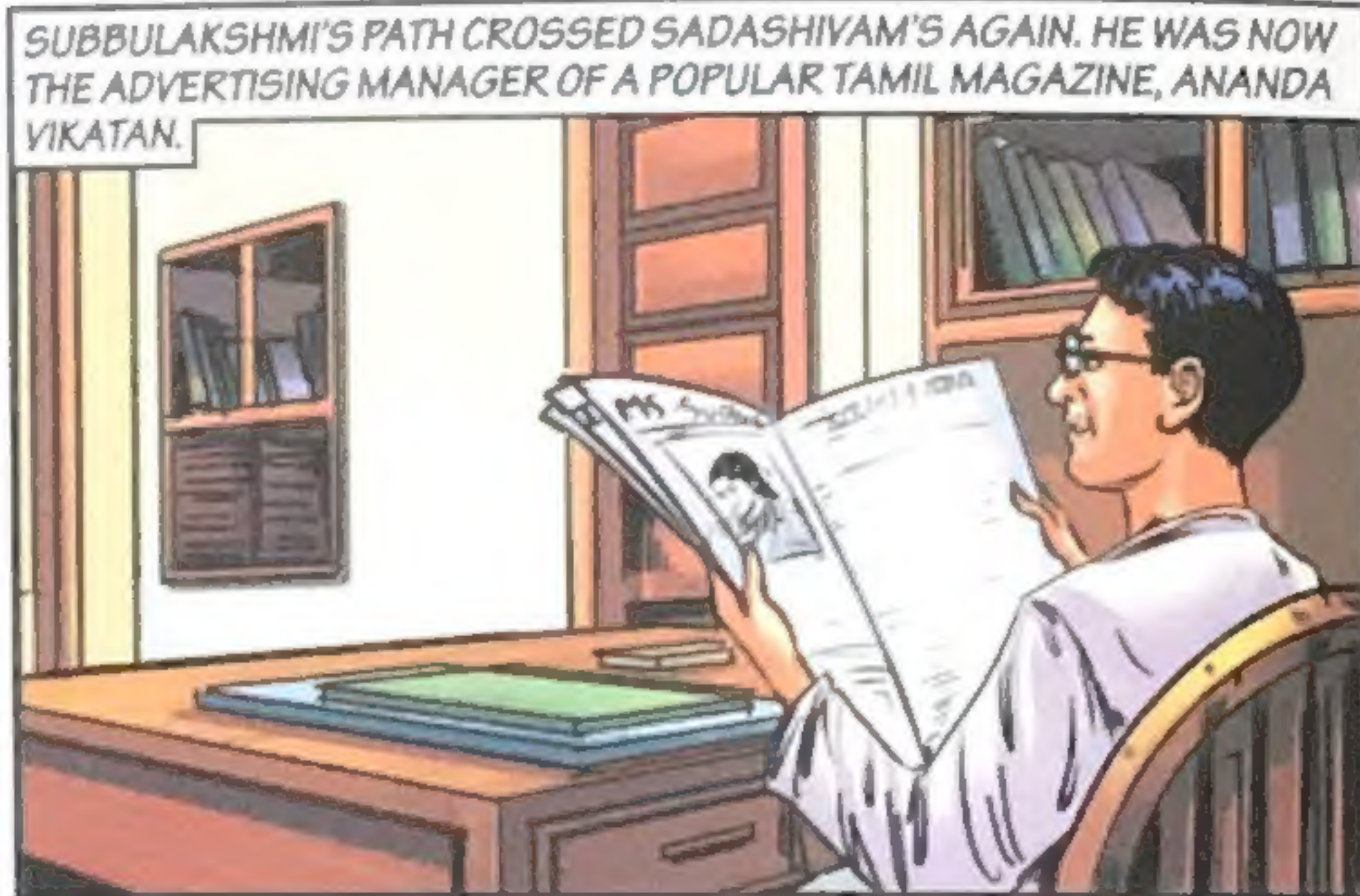


MADRAS MUSIC ACADEMY

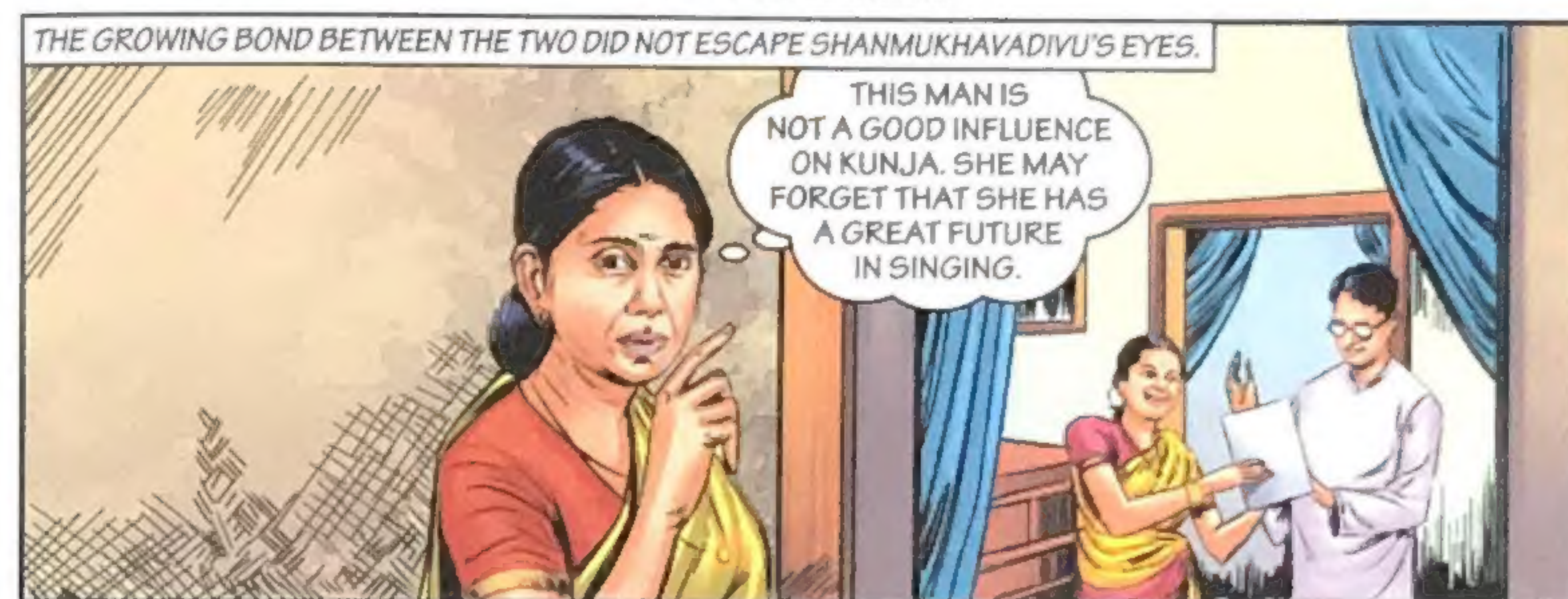
M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI

SHE CARRIES  
THE VEENA IN  
HER THROAT!





A SPECIAL FEATURE WAS PUBLISHED ON THE YOUNG SINGER.



SHANMUKHAVADIYU HAD MANY DREAMS FOR SUBBULAKSHMI.

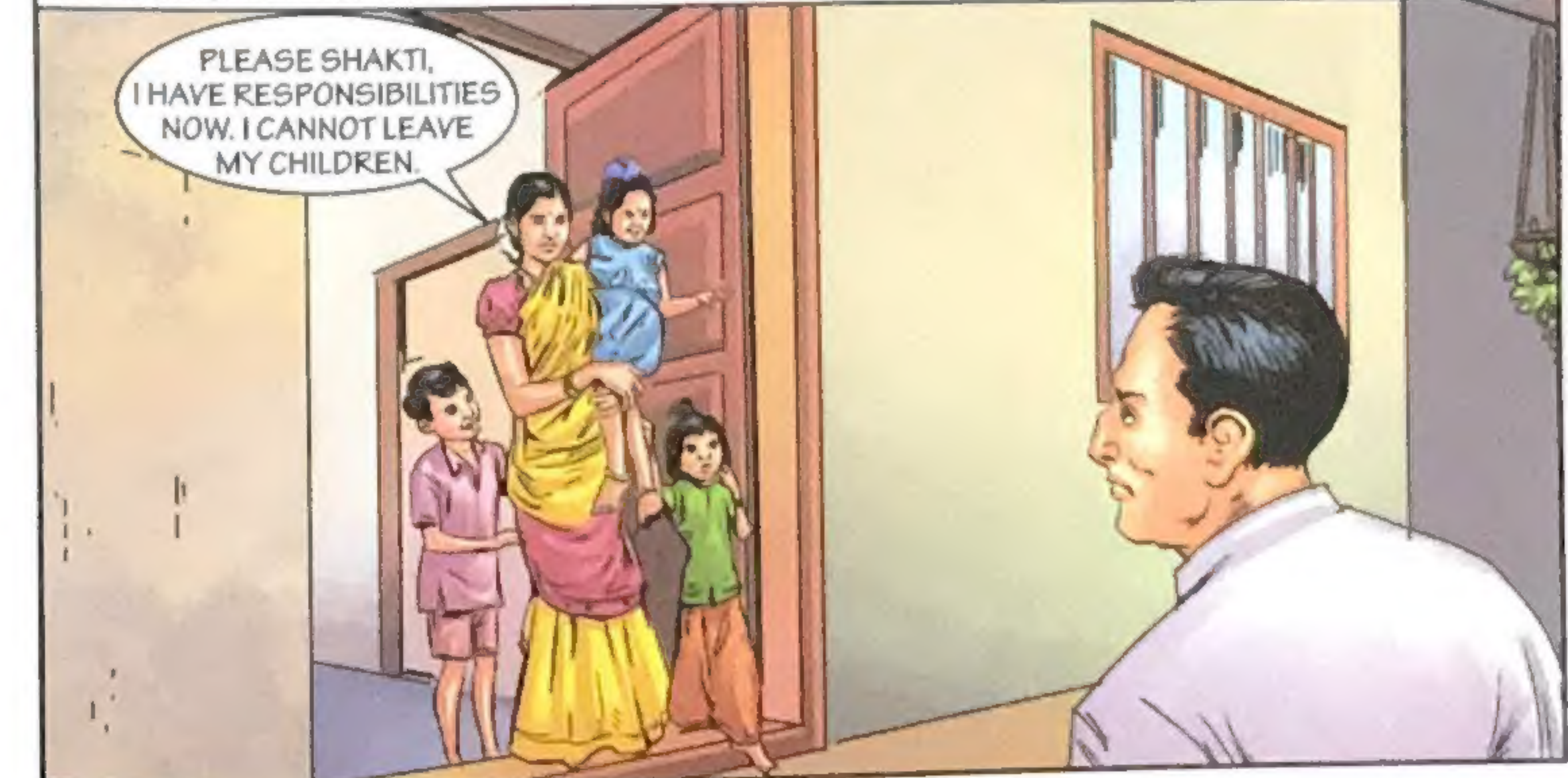
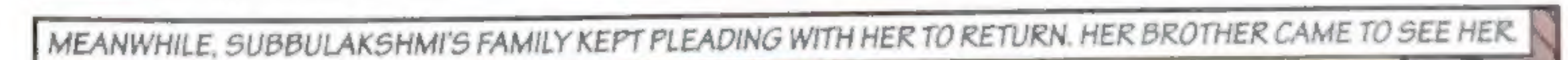
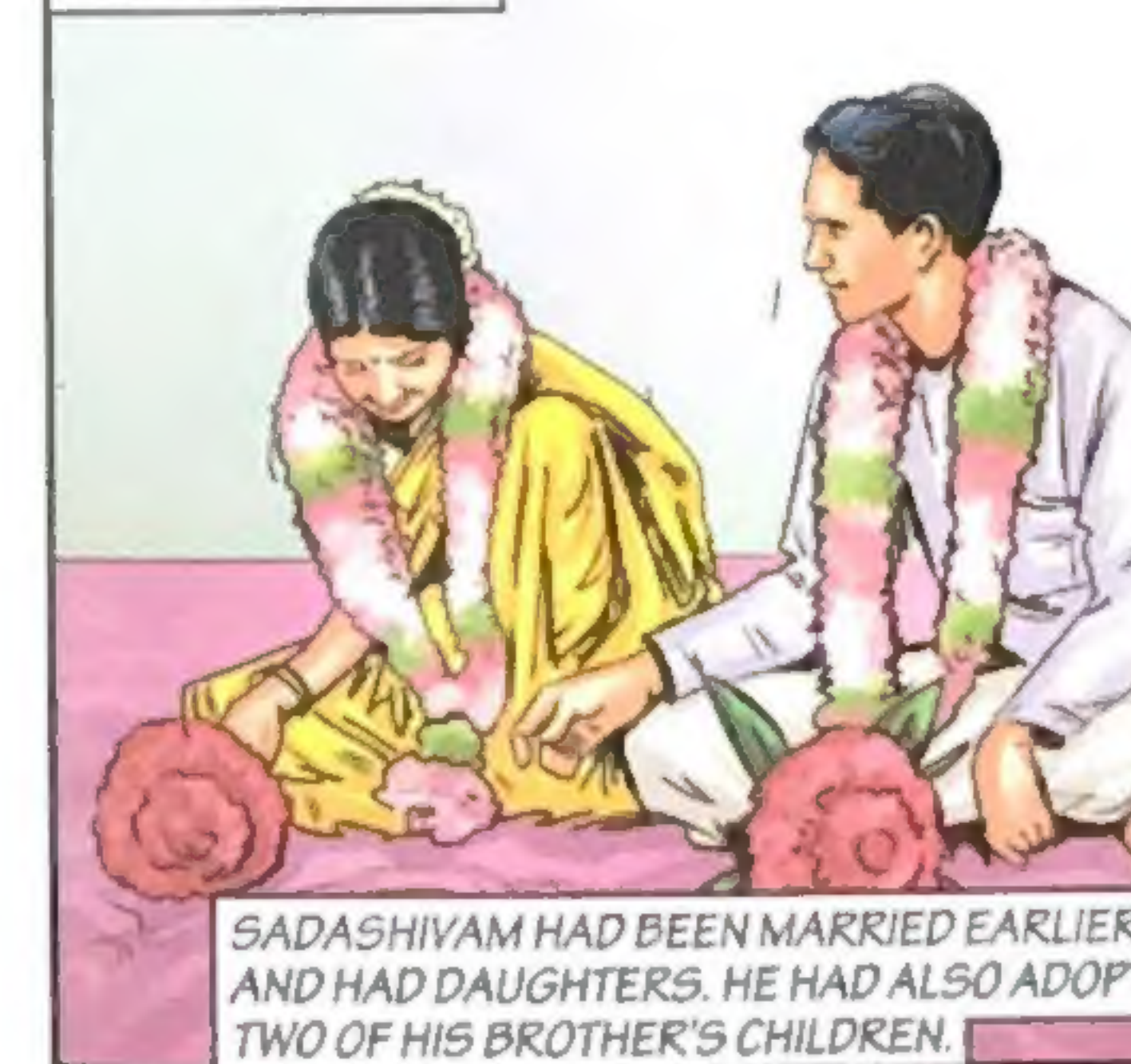
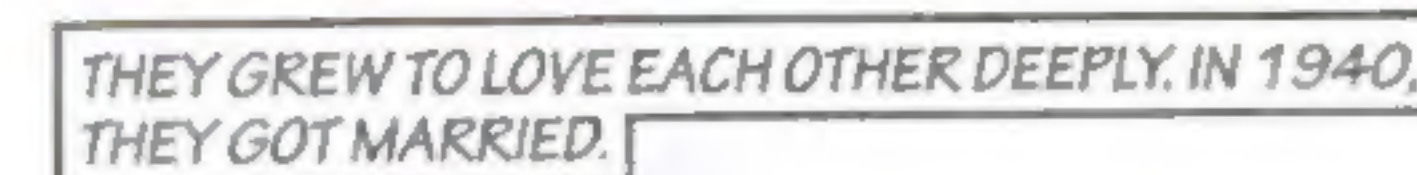
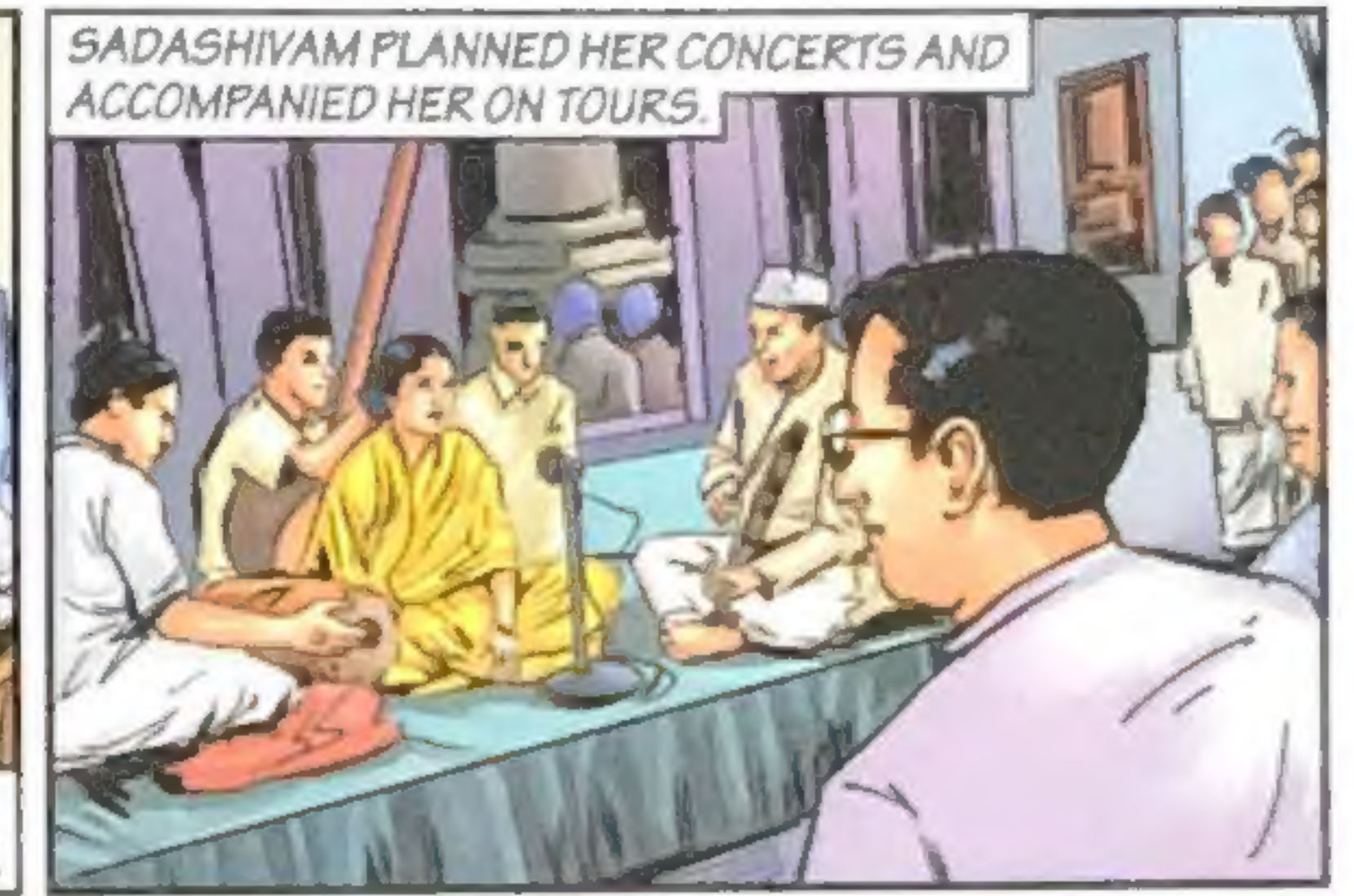
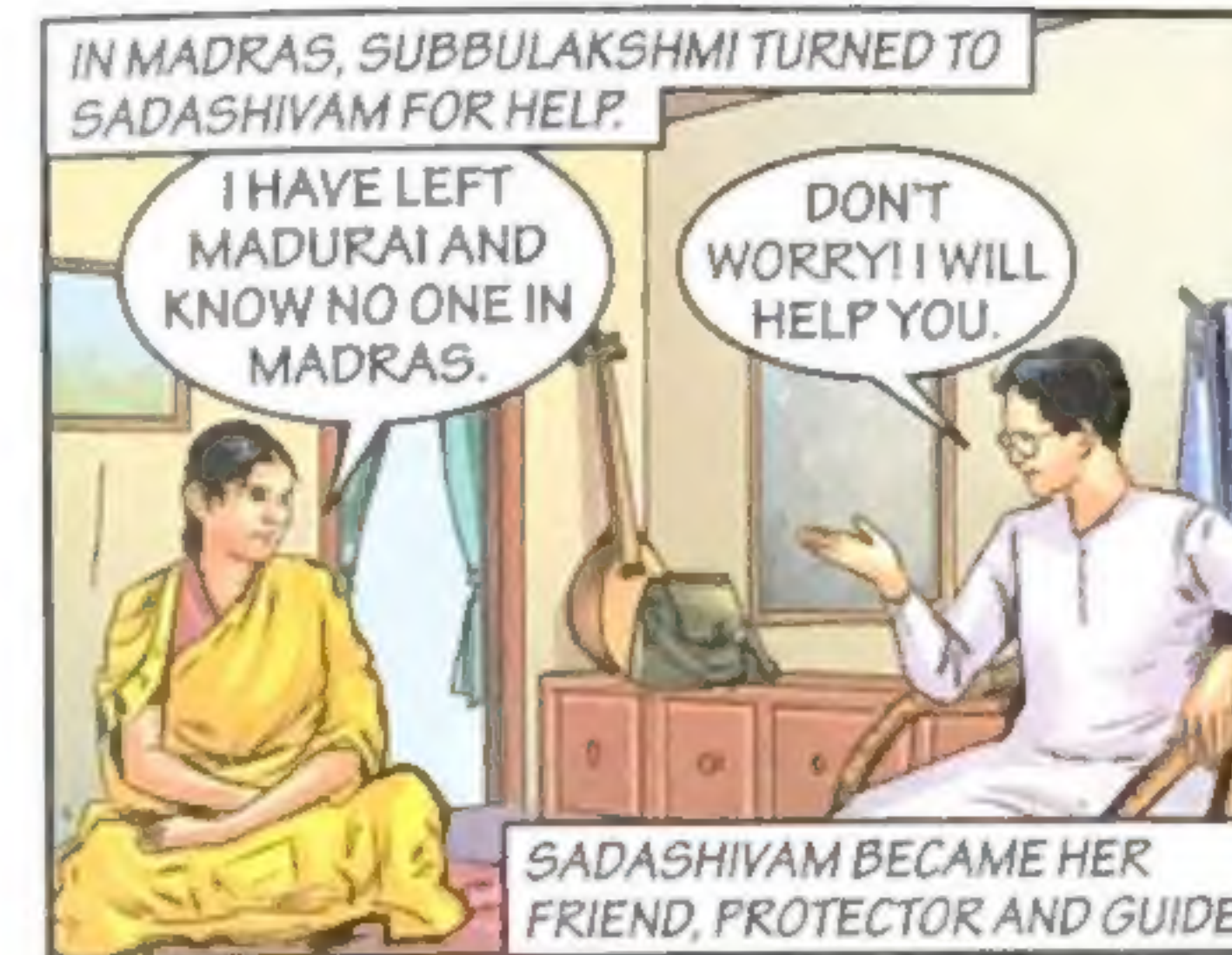
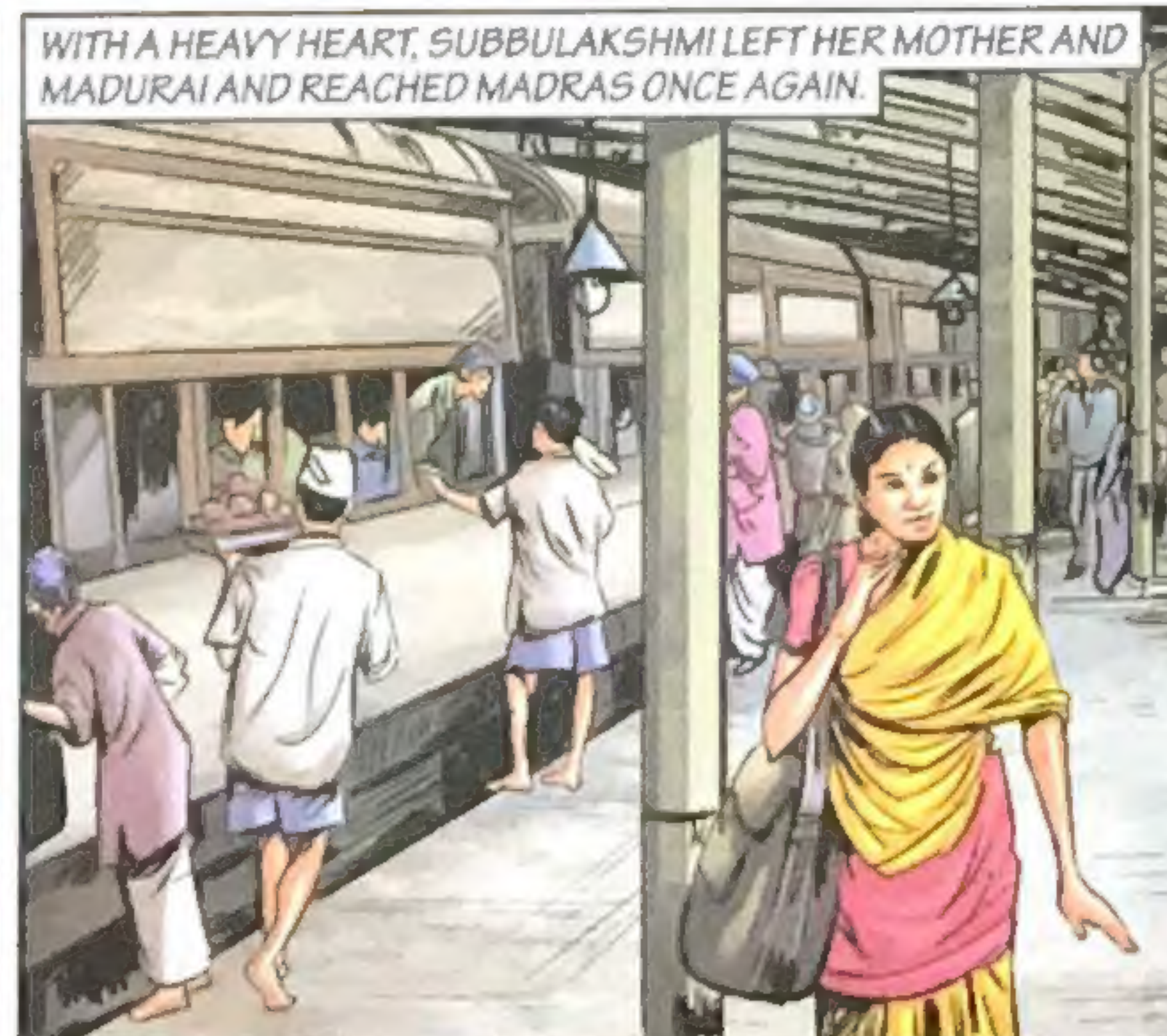
SHE SOLD THE HOUSE IN MADRAS AND TOOK SUBBULAKSHMI BACK TO MADURAI AND AWAY FROM SADASHIVAM.



BACK IN MADURAI -

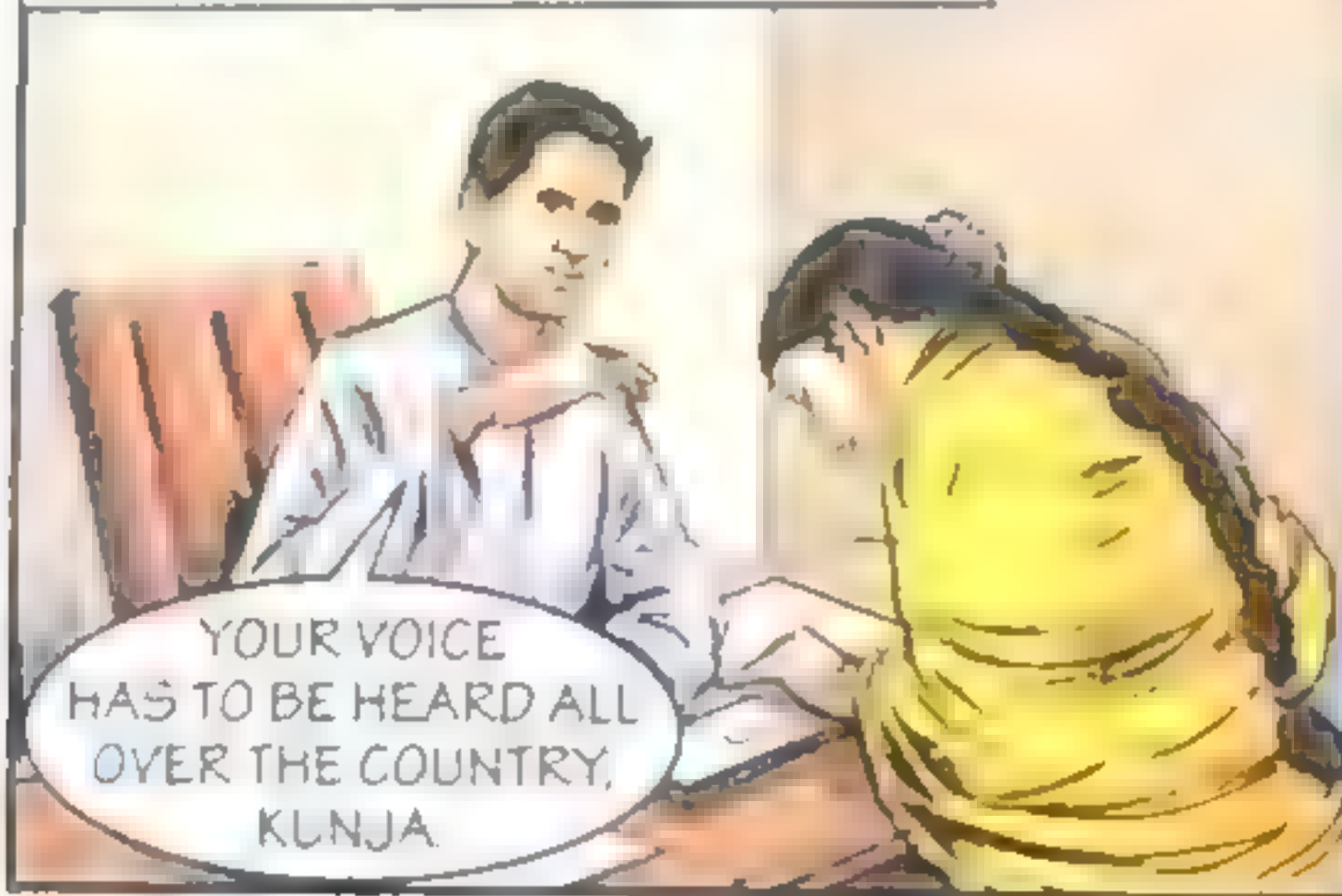




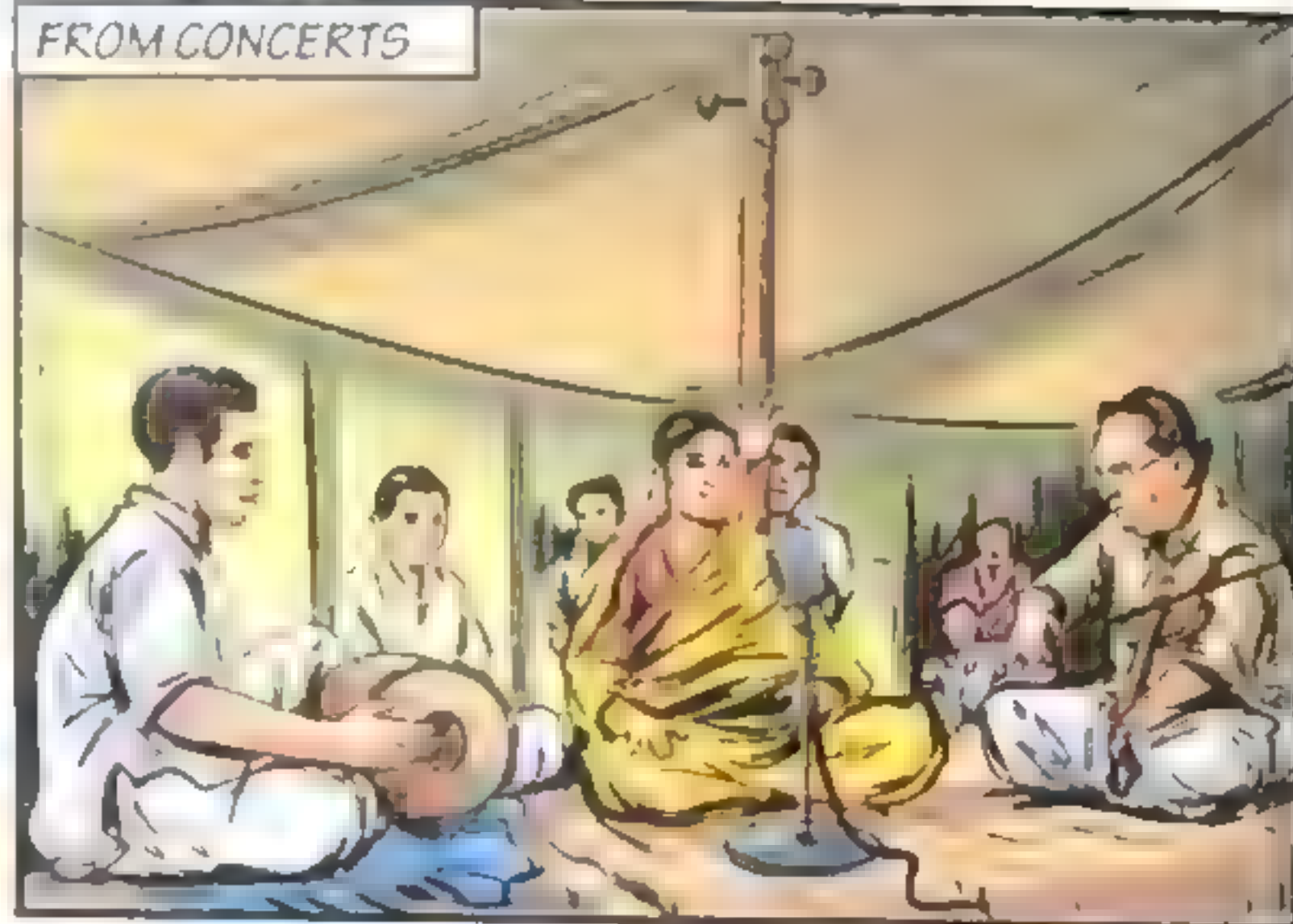




BETWEEN 1940 AND 1997 SADASHIVAM WAS THE ONLY FORCE IN SUBBULAKSHMI'S LIFE



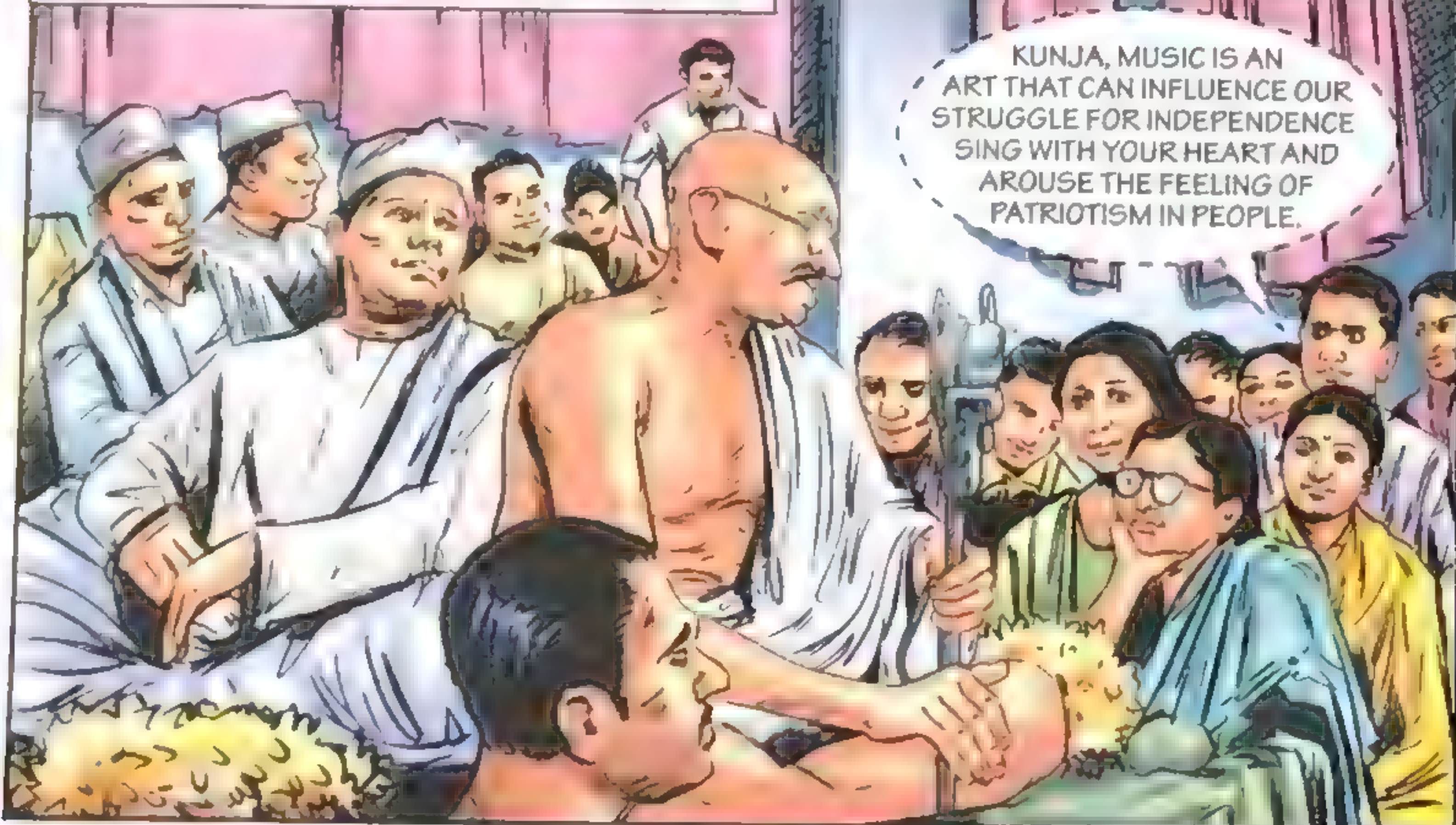
FROM CONCERTS



TO FILMS HE PLANNED AND SUPPORTED HER CAREER



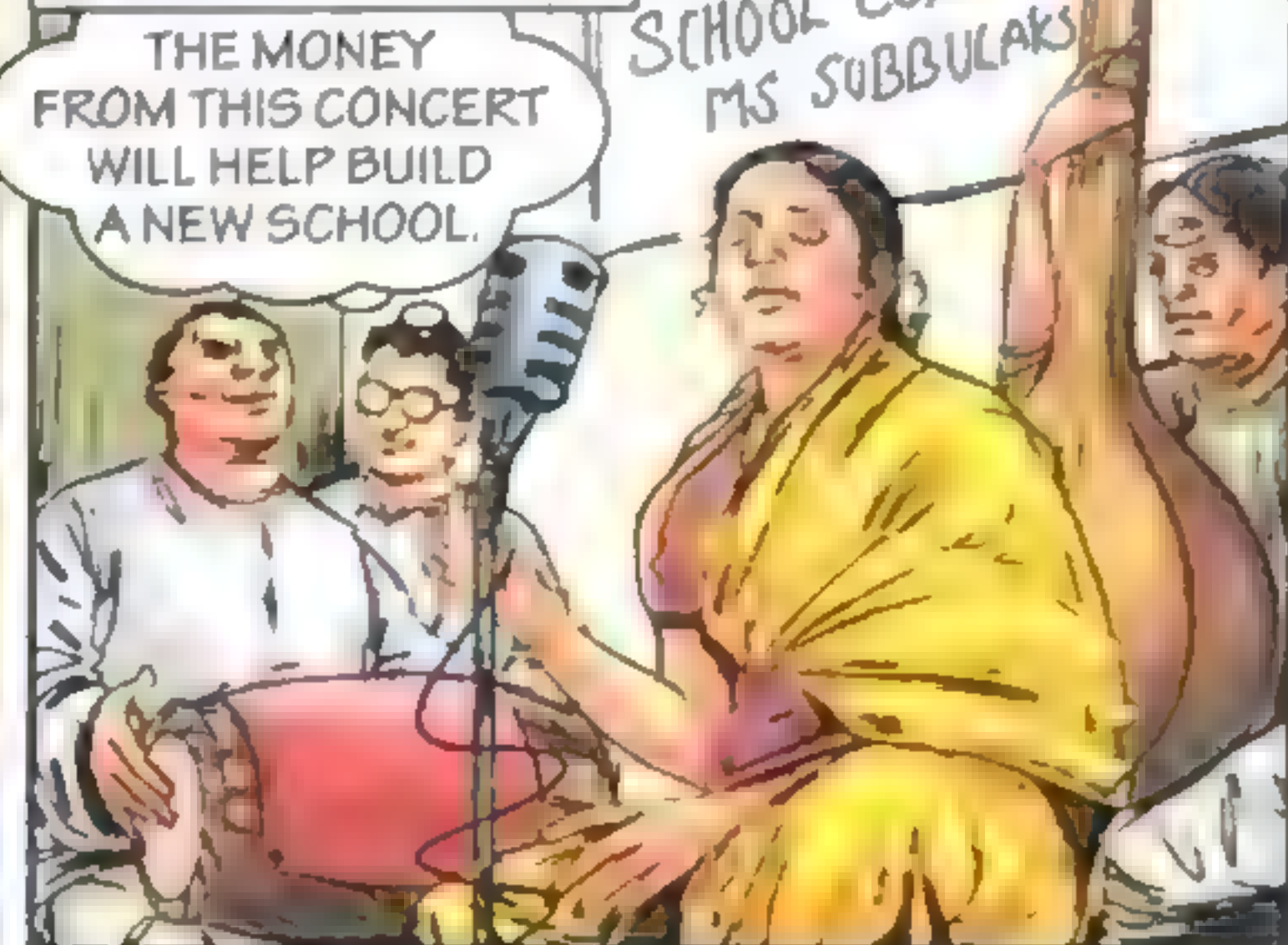
AT A PUBLIC MEETING WHERE MAHATMA GANDHI SPOKE -



DESPITE SUBBULAKSHMI'S SUCCESS AS A SINGER THEY WERE NOT VERY WELL-OFF



BUT THEY CONTINUED TO HELP OTHERS WHEREVER THEY COULD.



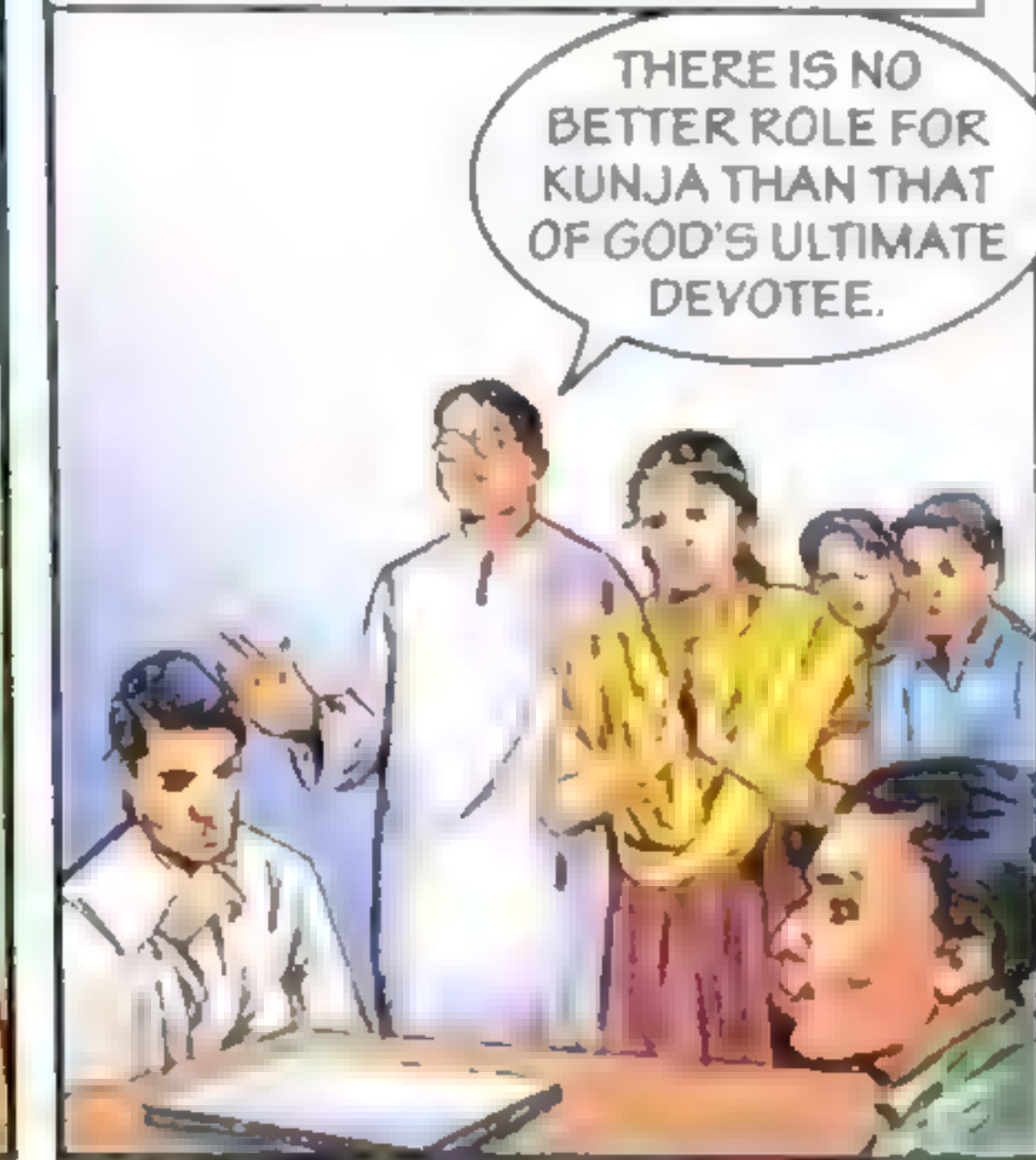
LIFE AT HOME CONTINUED AT ITS BLISSFUL PACE WITH LITTLE RADHA NOW LEARNING TO SING FROM HER MOTHER...



SUBBULAKSHMI'S SUCCESS AS A FILMSTAR GREW ESPECIALLY AFTER SHE PLAYED SHAKUNTALA AND THEN MEERA.



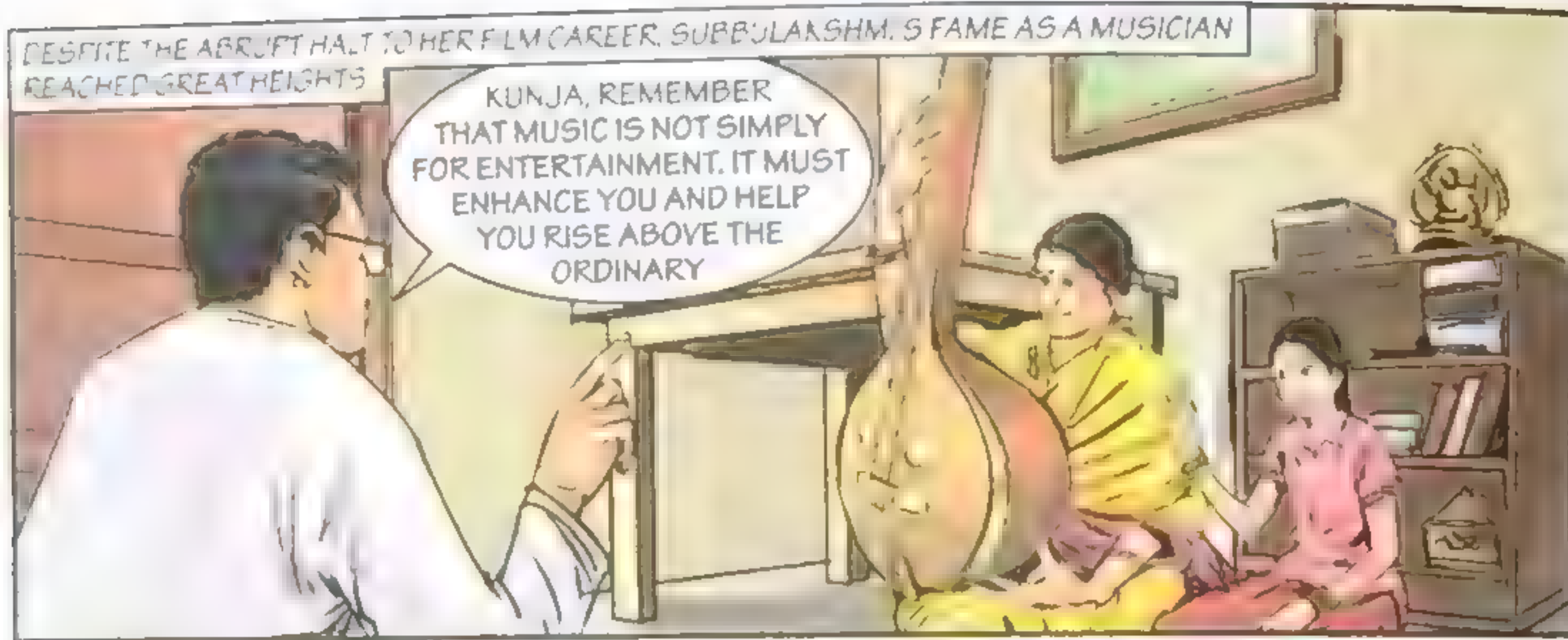
AFTER MEERA, SADASHIVAM DECIDED SHE SHOULD NO LONGER ACT IN FILMS!



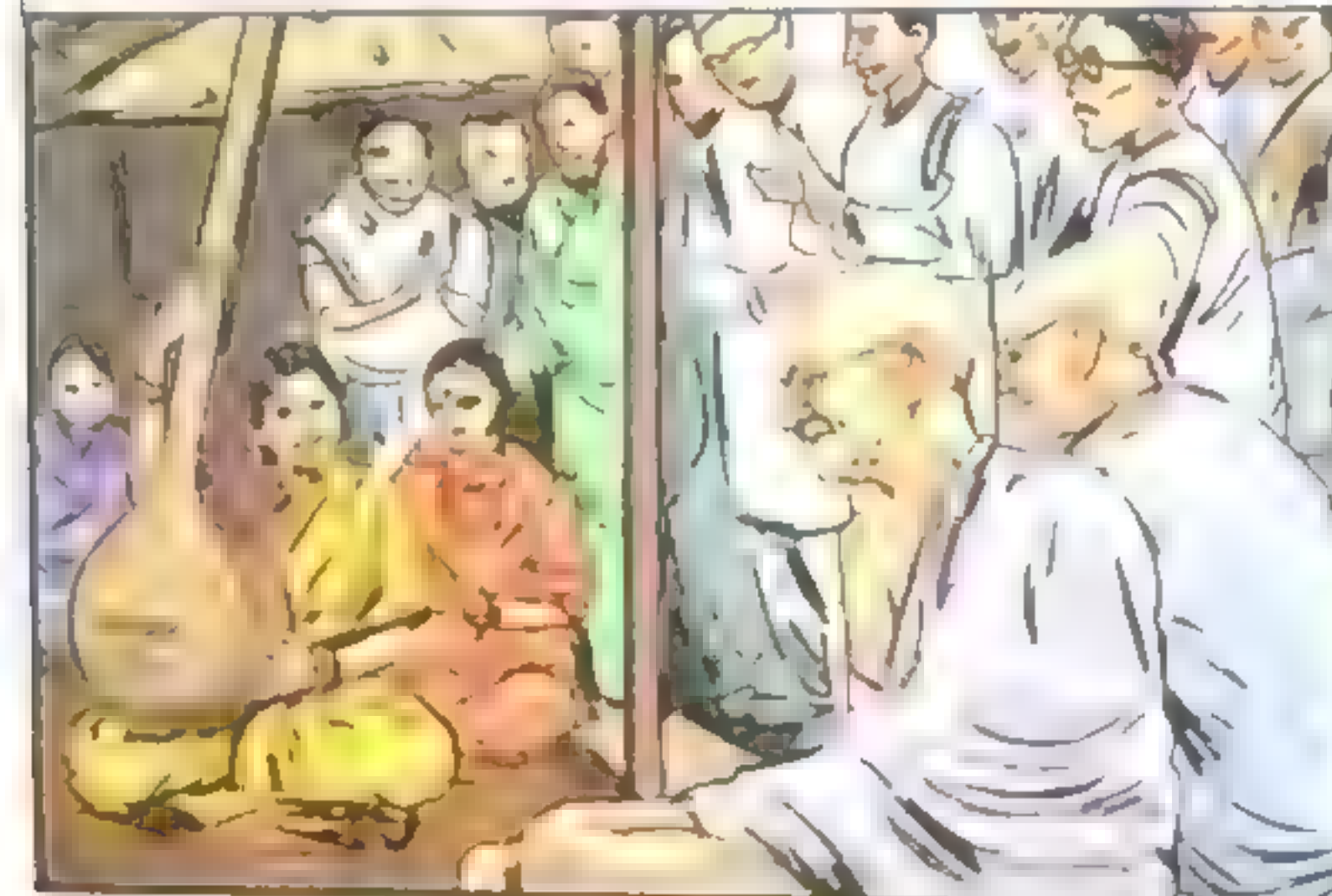
"NOTHING DO I LACK," A TAMIL DEVOTIONAL SONG BY C. RAJAGOPALACHARI



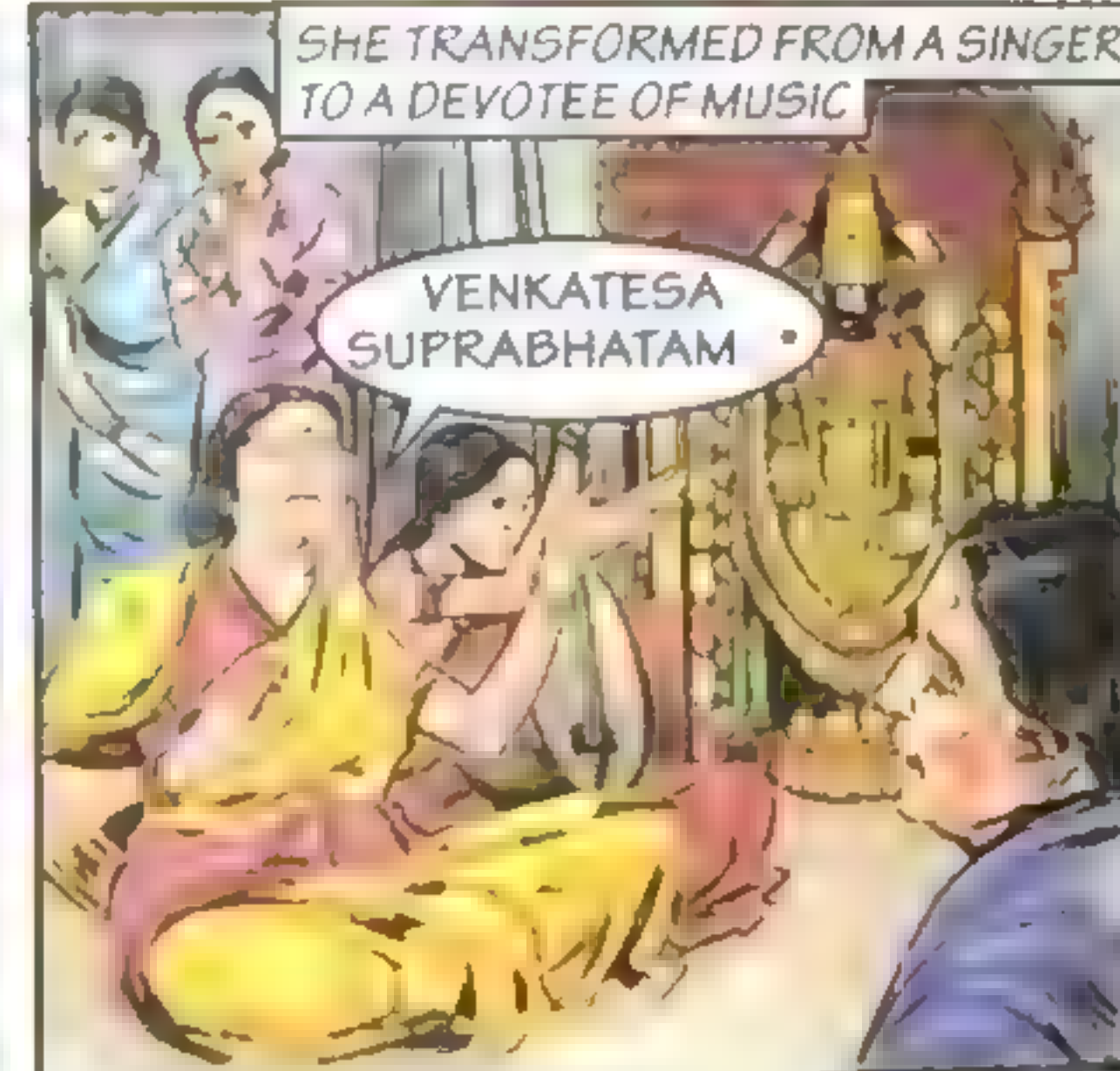
DESPITE THE ABRUPT HALT TO HER FILM CAREER, SUBBULAKSHMI'S FAME AS A MUSICIAN REACHED GREAT HEIGHTS



SADASHIVAM'S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE EXPOSED SUBBULAKSHMI TO A WIDE RANGE OF AUDIENCES



SHE TRANSFORMED FROM A SINGER TO A DEVOTEE OF MUSIC



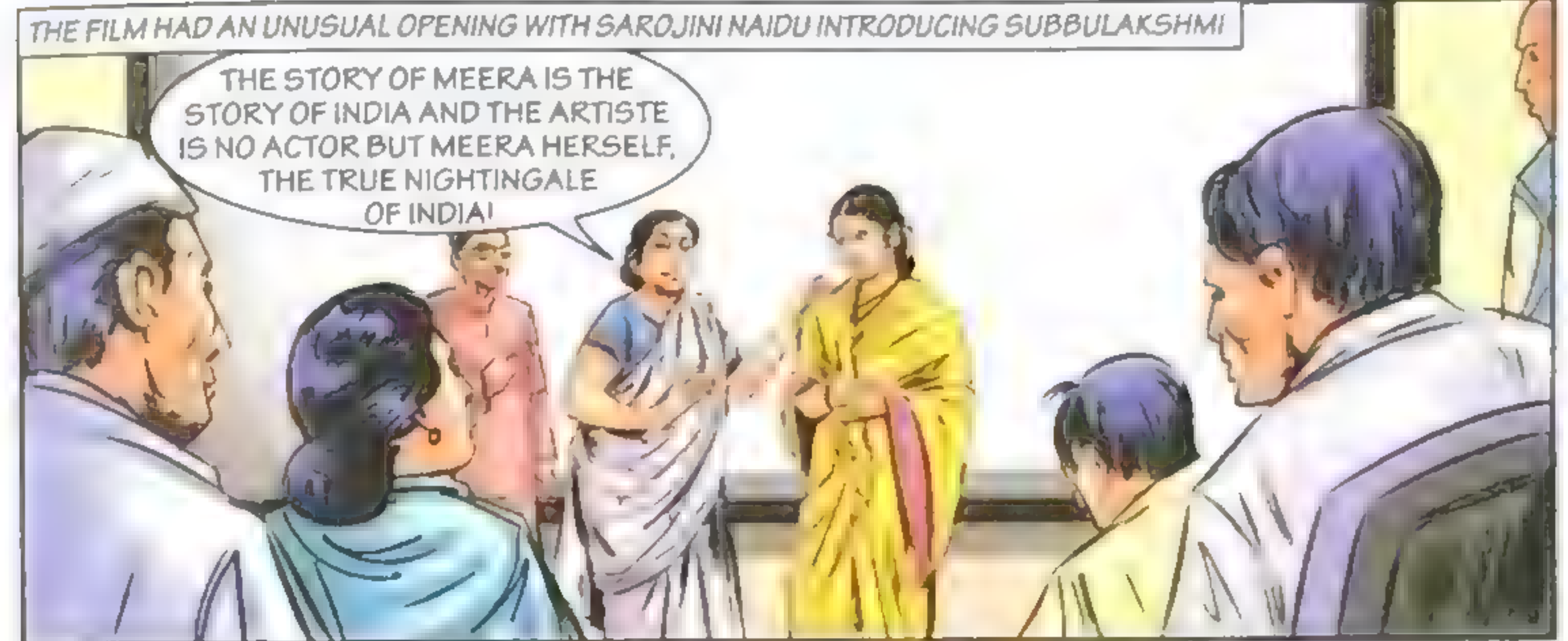
THE SUCCESS OF MEERA WITH SOUTH INDIAN AUDIENCES, LED TO IT BEING DUBBED IN HINDI. THE FILM WAS PREMIERED IN DELHI AT A SPECIAL SCREENING HOSTED BY PANDIT JAWAHARLAL NEHRU.



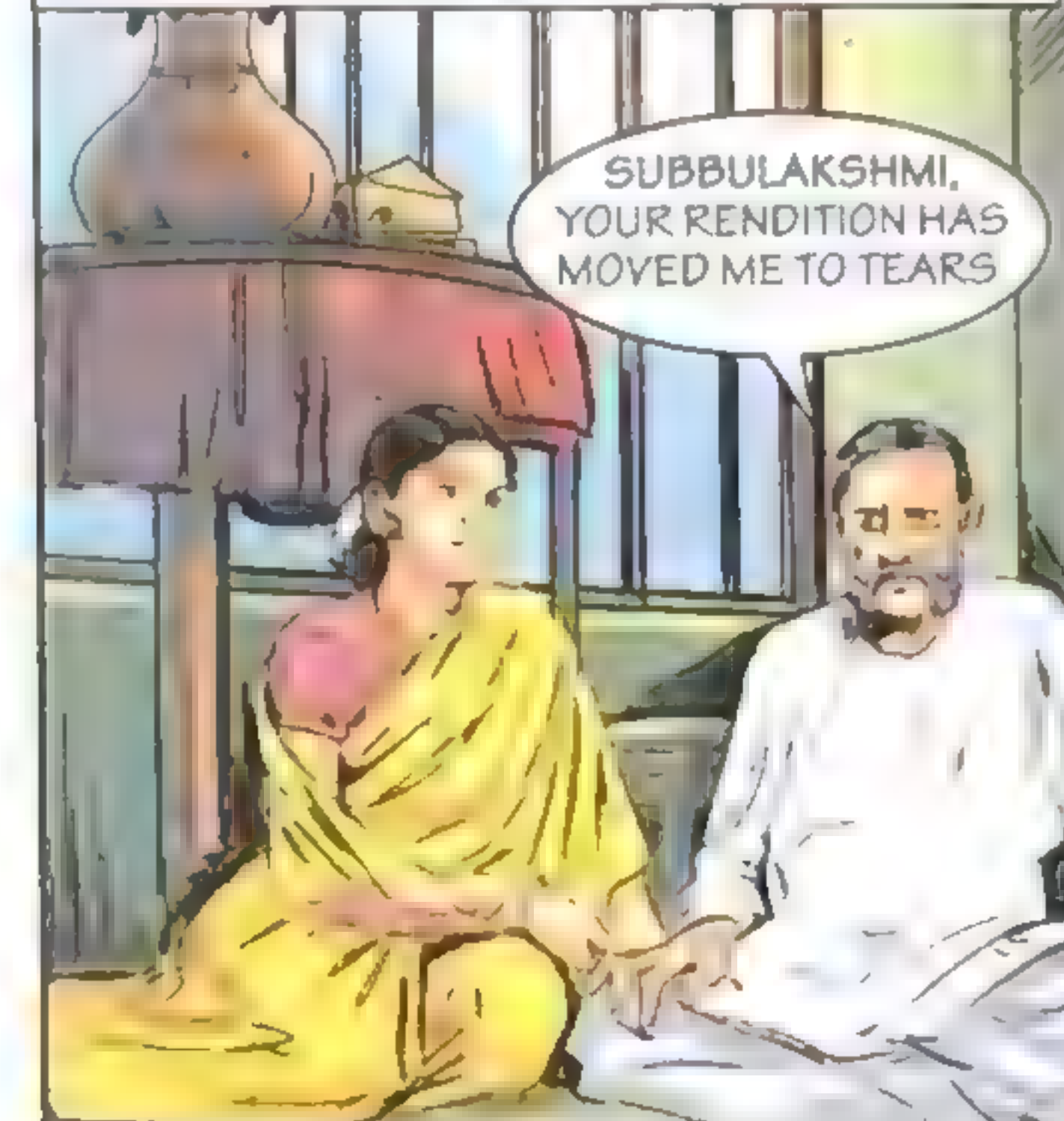
THE GUESTS INCLUDED SAROJINI NAIDU AND LORD AND LADY MOUNTBATTEN

\*A HYMN SUNG AT DAWN TO AWAKE THE GOD AT TIRUPATI

THE FILM HAD AN UNUSUAL OPENING WITH SAROJINI NAIDU INTRODUCING SUBBULAKSHMI



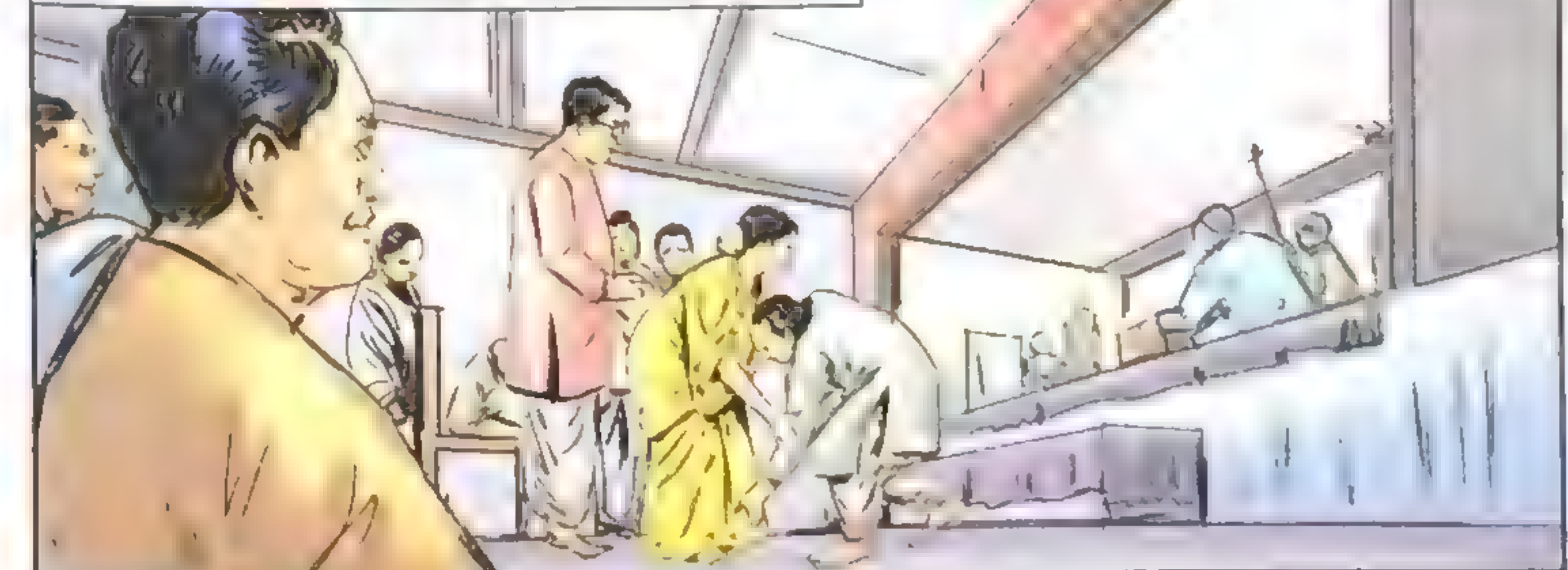
MANY MORE ACCOLADES FOLLOWED FROM NOTED HINDUSTANI VOCALISTS, USTAD ALLADIYA KHAN...



AND BADE GHULAM ALI KHAN

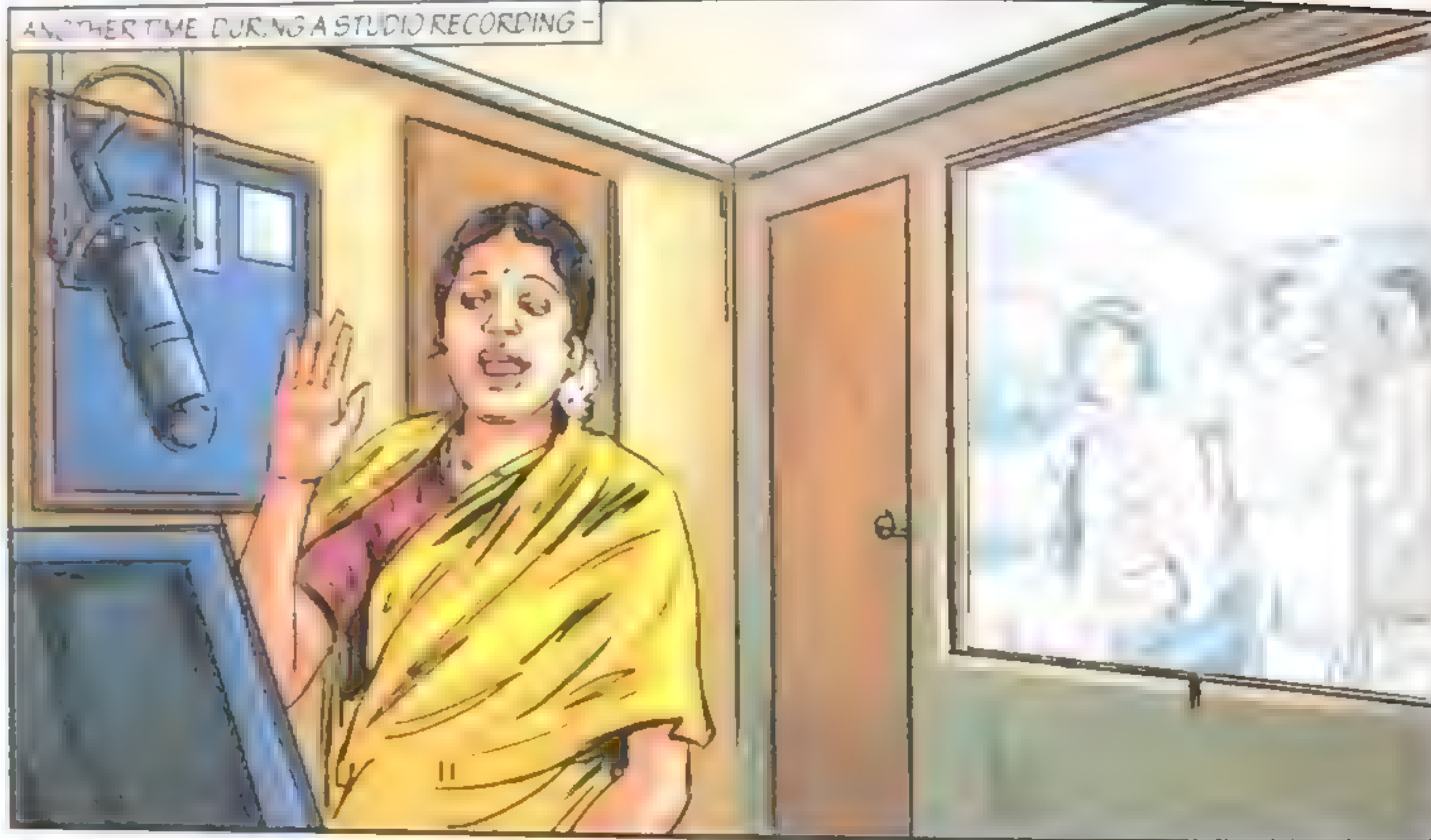


TO YOUNGER CONTEMPORARIES SUCH AS PANDIT JASRAJ





ANOTHER TIME DURING A STUDIO RECORDING -



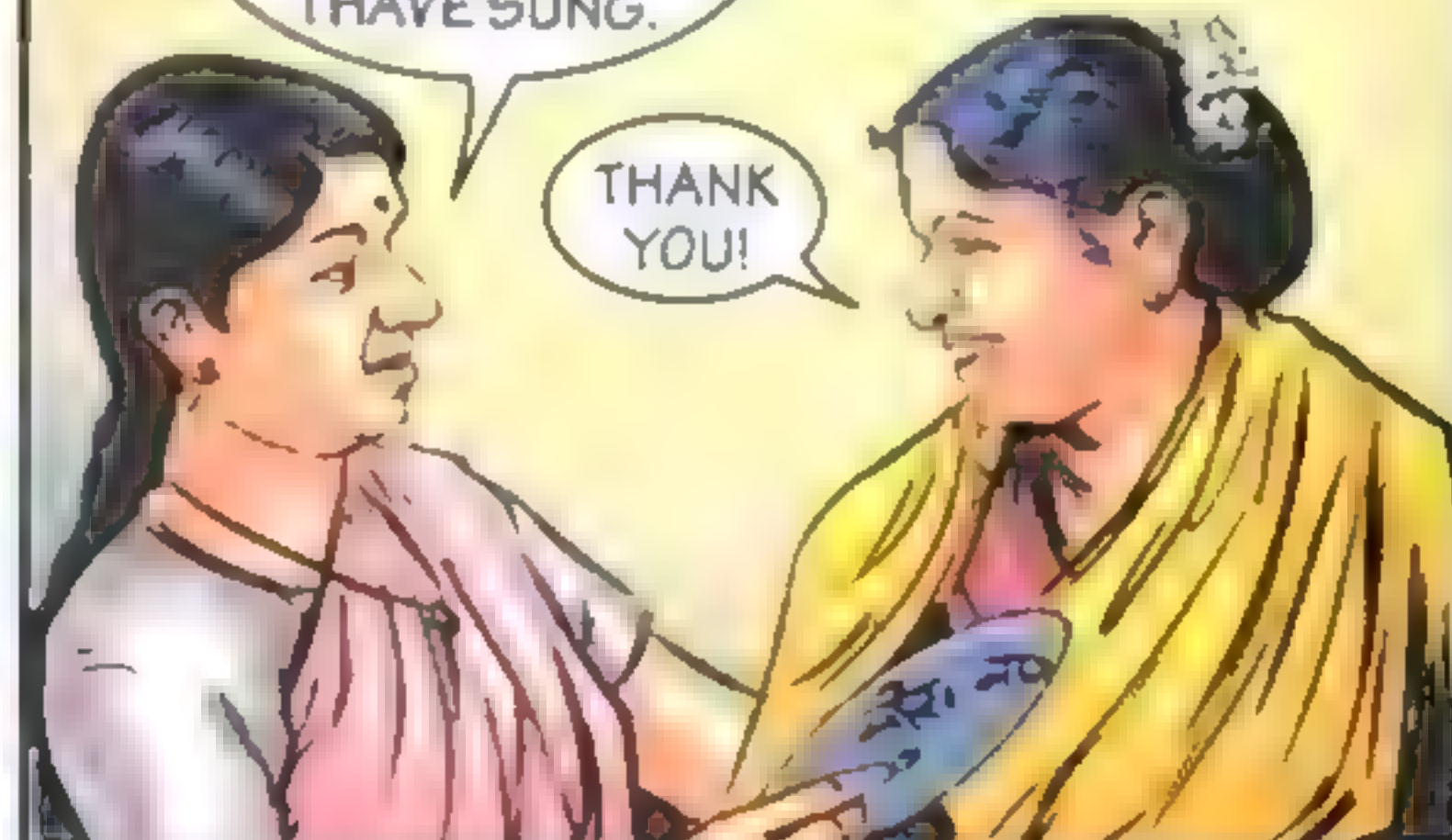
I CANNOT RECORD TODAY! NOT AFTER LISTENING TO THAT WONDERFUL VOICE!

THE YOUNG GIRL WAS NONE OTHER THAN LATA MANGESHKAR.

ALTHOUGH LATA WENT ON TO BE AN ESTABLISHED SINGER...

THIS IS AN ALBUM OF MEERA'S BHAJANS THAT I HAVE SUNG.

THANK YOU!



HER ADMIRATION FOR SUBBULAKSHMI REMAINED UNDIMMED. YEARS LATER, SHE FLEW DOWN TO MADRAS TO PRESENT SUBBULAKSHMI WITH THE DINANATH MANGESHKAR AWARD



ANOTHER HUGE INFLUENCE IN SUBBULAKSHMI'S LIFE WAS POLITICAL ACTIVIST C. RAJAGOPALACHARI OR RAJAJI, AS HE WAS POPULARLY KNOWN. IN 1944 -



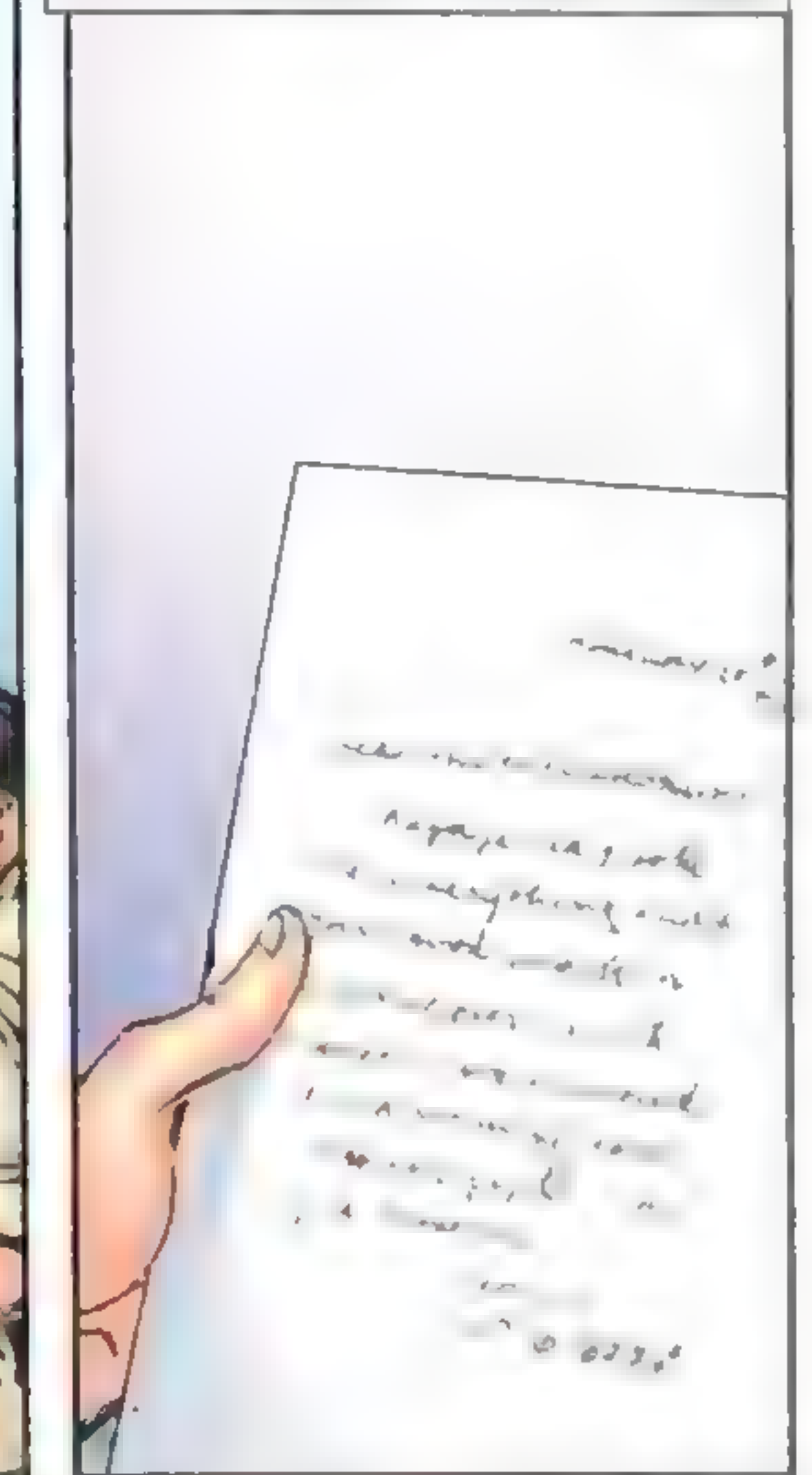
KUNJA, GANDHIJI IS SETTING UP THE KASTURBA MEMORIAL FUND. I THINK IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR YOU TO HELP HIM RAISE MONEY BY GIVING SOME RECITALS

SUBBULAKSHMI GAVE FIVE RECITALS TO FURTHER GANDHI'S CAUSE.



MAIN HARI CHARAN KI DASI."

TO ACKNOWLEDGE HER CONTRIBUTION, GANDHI SENT A PERSONAL LETTER WITH HIS BLESSINGS, SIGNED IN TAMIL!



"I AM A MERE SERVANT AT THE FEET OF THE LORD," A SONG BY MIRABAI



ON OCTOBER 1, 1947 -

BAPU WANTS TO HEAR HARI TUM HARO\* SUNG BY SUBBULAKSHMI FOR HIS BIRTHDAY TOMORROW.

BUT SHE DOES NOT KNOW THAT SONG.

BAPU INSISTS THAT HE WOULD RATHER HEAR SUBBULAKSHMI SPEAK THE BHAJAN THAN ANYONE ELSE SING IT!

SUBBULAKSHMI LEARNT AND RECORDED THE SONG OVERNIGHT.

HARI TUM HARO....

SADASHIVAM HAS SENT SUBBULAKSHMI'S BHAJAN AS YOU REQUESTED.

BUT ON JANUARY 30, 1948, THE SAME BHAJAN PLAYED ON ALL INDIA RADIO, JUST AFTER A SAD ANNOUNCEMENT -

MAHATMA GANDHI HAS BEEN ASSASSINATED!

OH NO!

\*A BHAJAN BY MIRABAI

SUBBULAKSHMI'S VOICE CAPTIVATED MANY HEARTS AND MINDS, INCLUDING JAWAHARLAL NEHRU.

WHO AM I, A MERE PRIME MINISTER BEFORE A QUEEN? M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI IS THE QUEEN OF SONG AND ART.

... INDIRA GANDHI...

THE PRAYER SONG BY SUBBULAKSHMI IS ENOUGH TO GUARANTEE SUCCESS!

... AND RAJIV GANDHI.

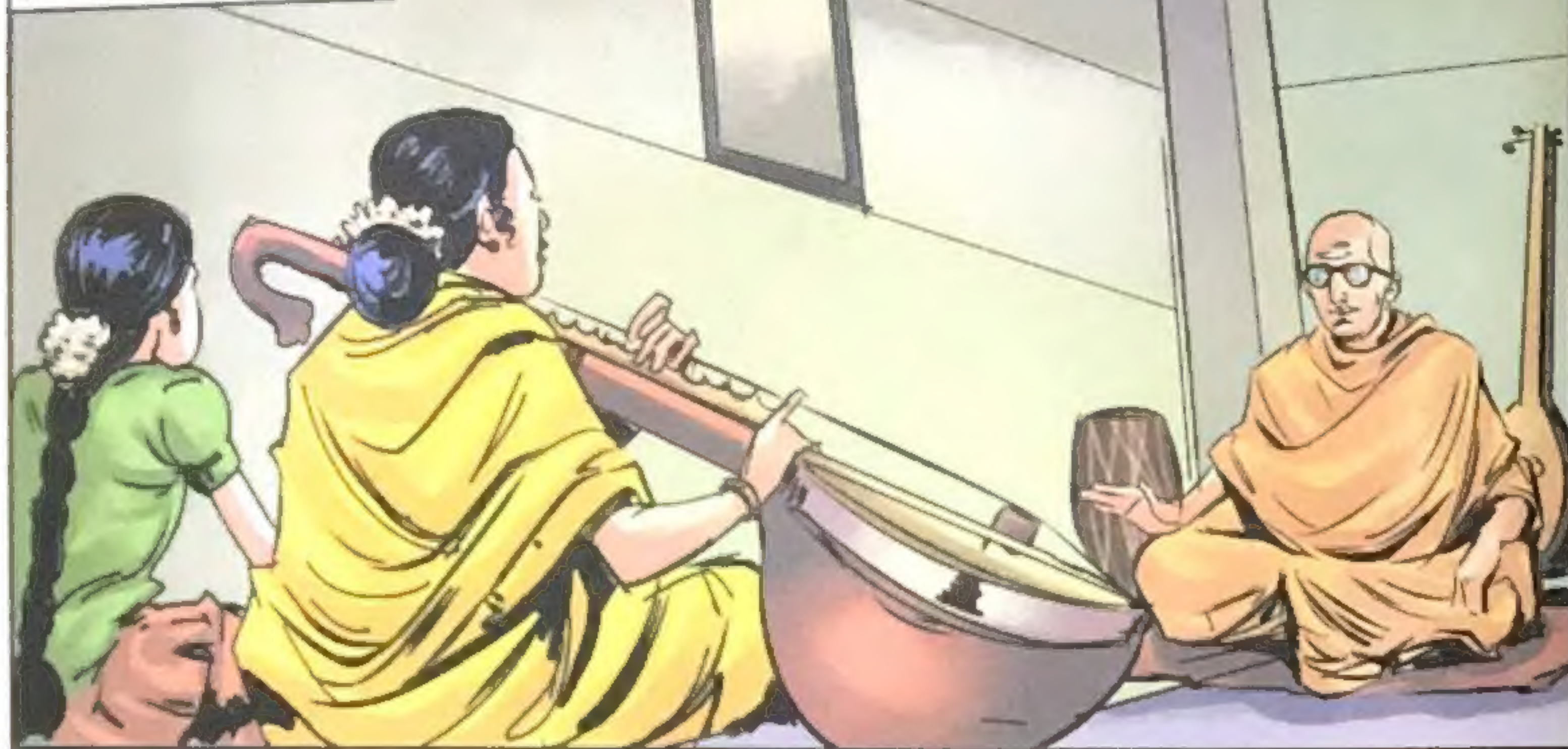
IT'S AN HONOUR, MADAM, TO MEET YOU.

DESPITE HER MANY SUCCESSES, SUBBULAKSHMI CONTINUED TO REMAIN A STUDENT AND SOON SHE HAD A NEW GURU...

...SEMMANGUDI SRINIVASA IYER - A GREAT TEACHER AND A GREAT PERFORMER HIMSELF.



UNDER HIS GUIDANCE, SUBBULAKSHMI WAS EXPOSED TO MANY DIFFERENT FORMS OF MUSIC AND HER SINGING SCALED GREATER HEIGHTS.



THERE WERE MANY CONCERTS IN INDIA...



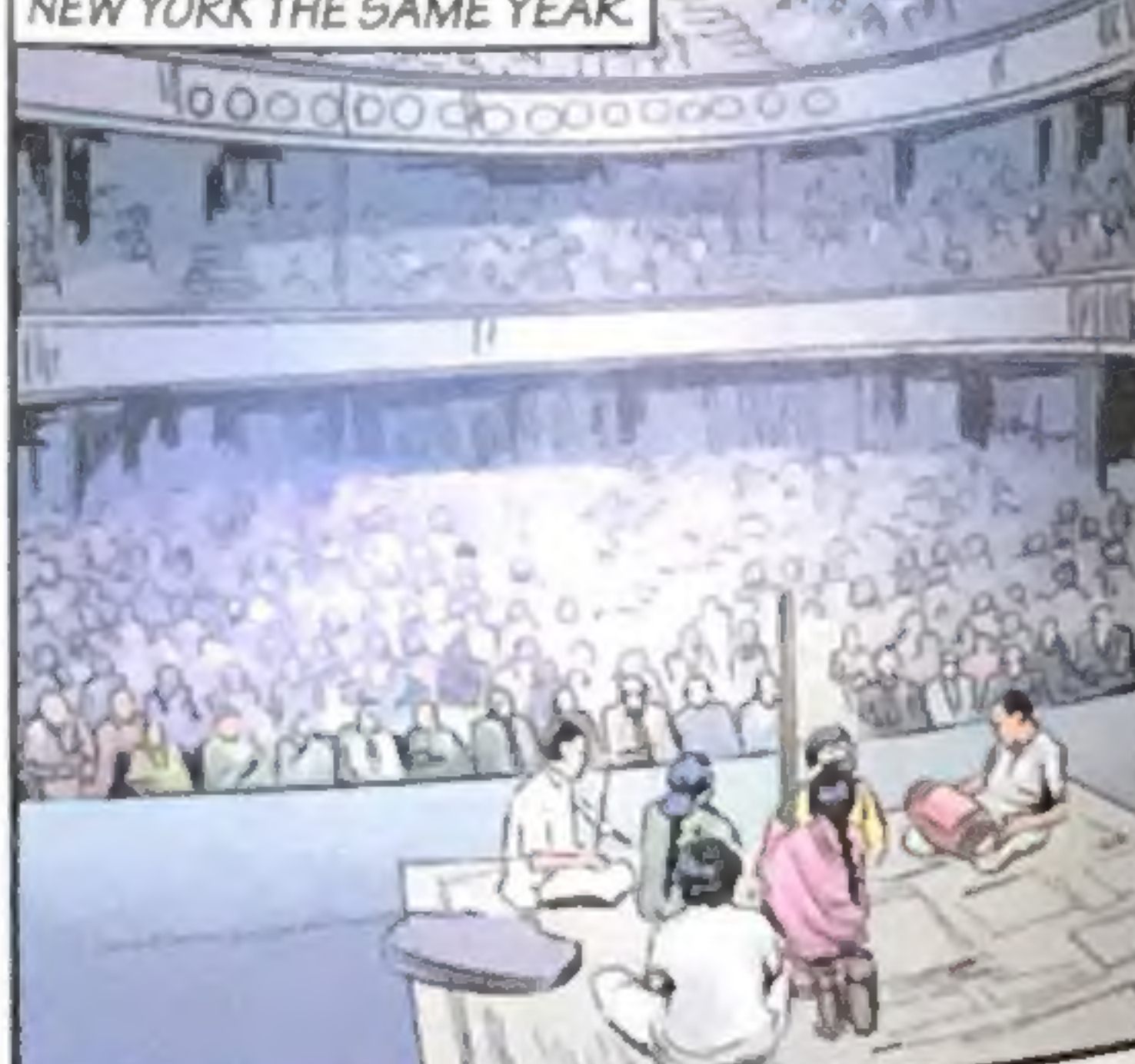
...AND ABROAD, INCLUDING THE EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF MUSIC AND DRAMA IN 1963...



... CELEBRATING U.N. DAY AT THE U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY IN 1966...



... AND A CONCERT AT THE CARNEGIE HALL IN NEW YORK THE SAME YEAR.

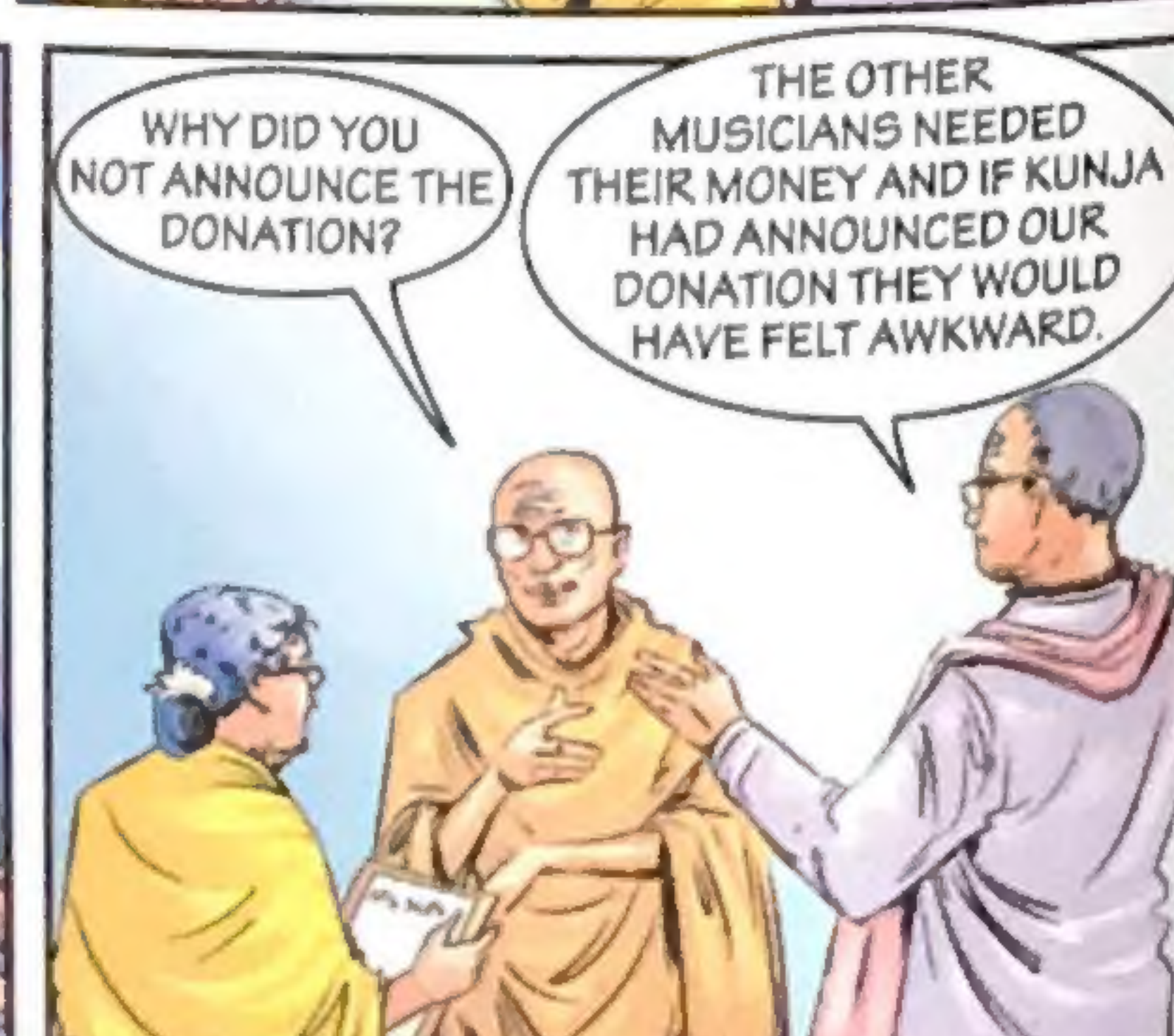
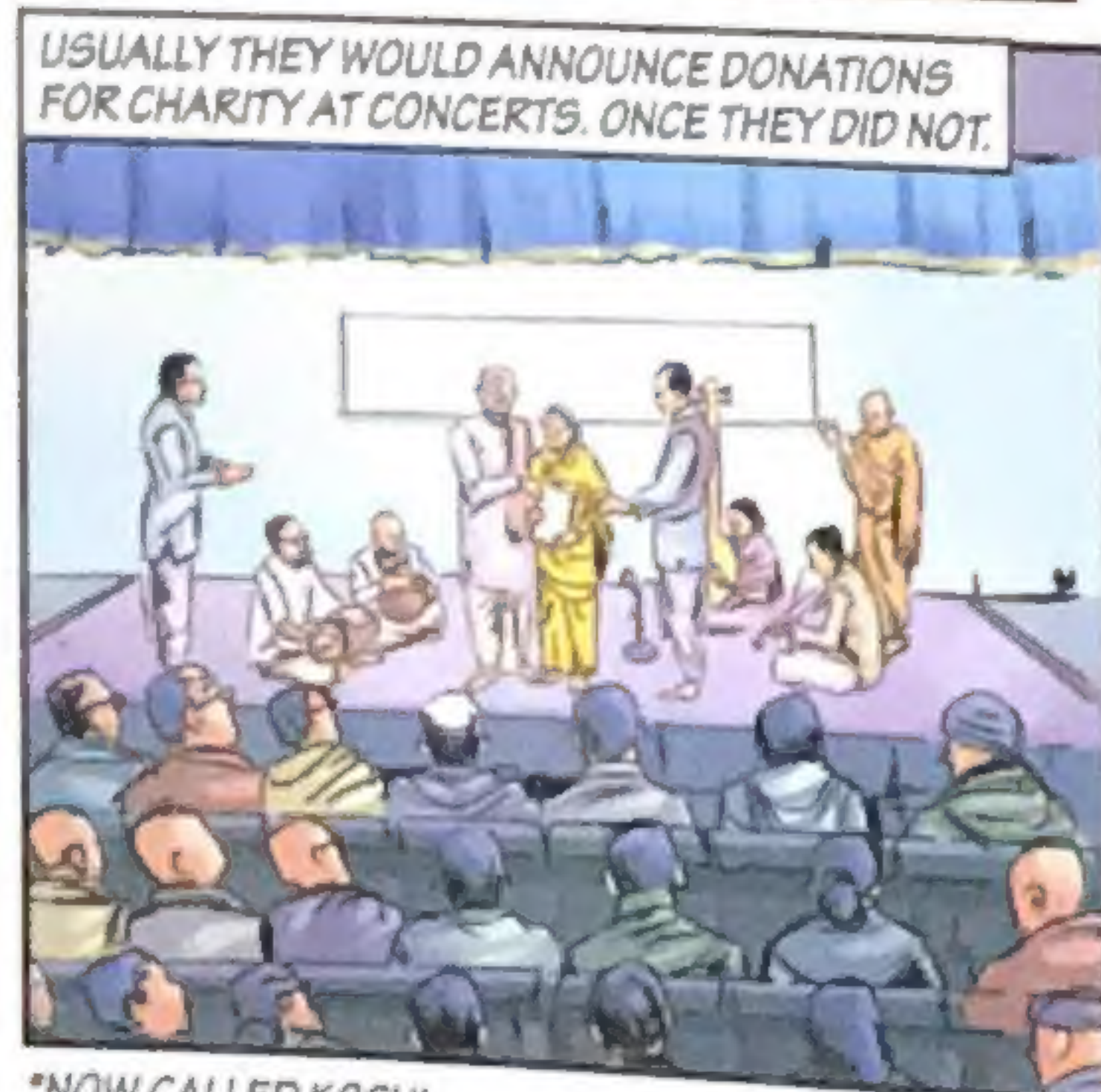
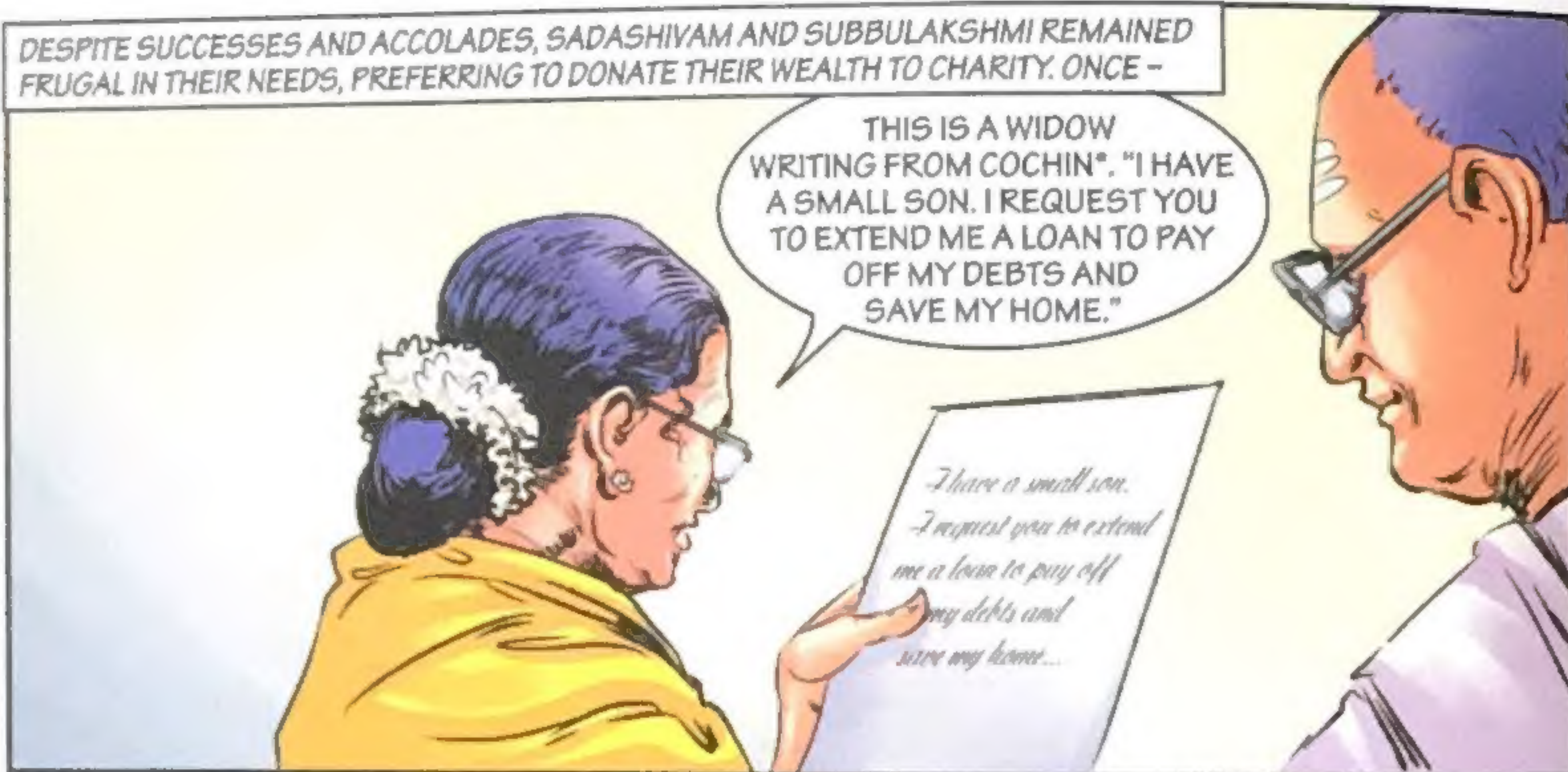


IN INDIA, AWARDS CAME ONE AFTER THE OTHER. M. S. SUBBULAKSHMI WAS GIVEN THE PADMA BHUSHAN IN 1954, THE SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI AWARD IN 1956, THE SANGEETHA KALANIDHI AWARD IN 1968 AND THE RAMON MAGSAYSAY AWARD IN 1974. SHE WAS CONFERRED THE PADMA VIBHUSHAN IN 1975, AND IN 1998, INDIA'S HIGHEST CIVILIAN AWARD, THE BHARAT RATNA.

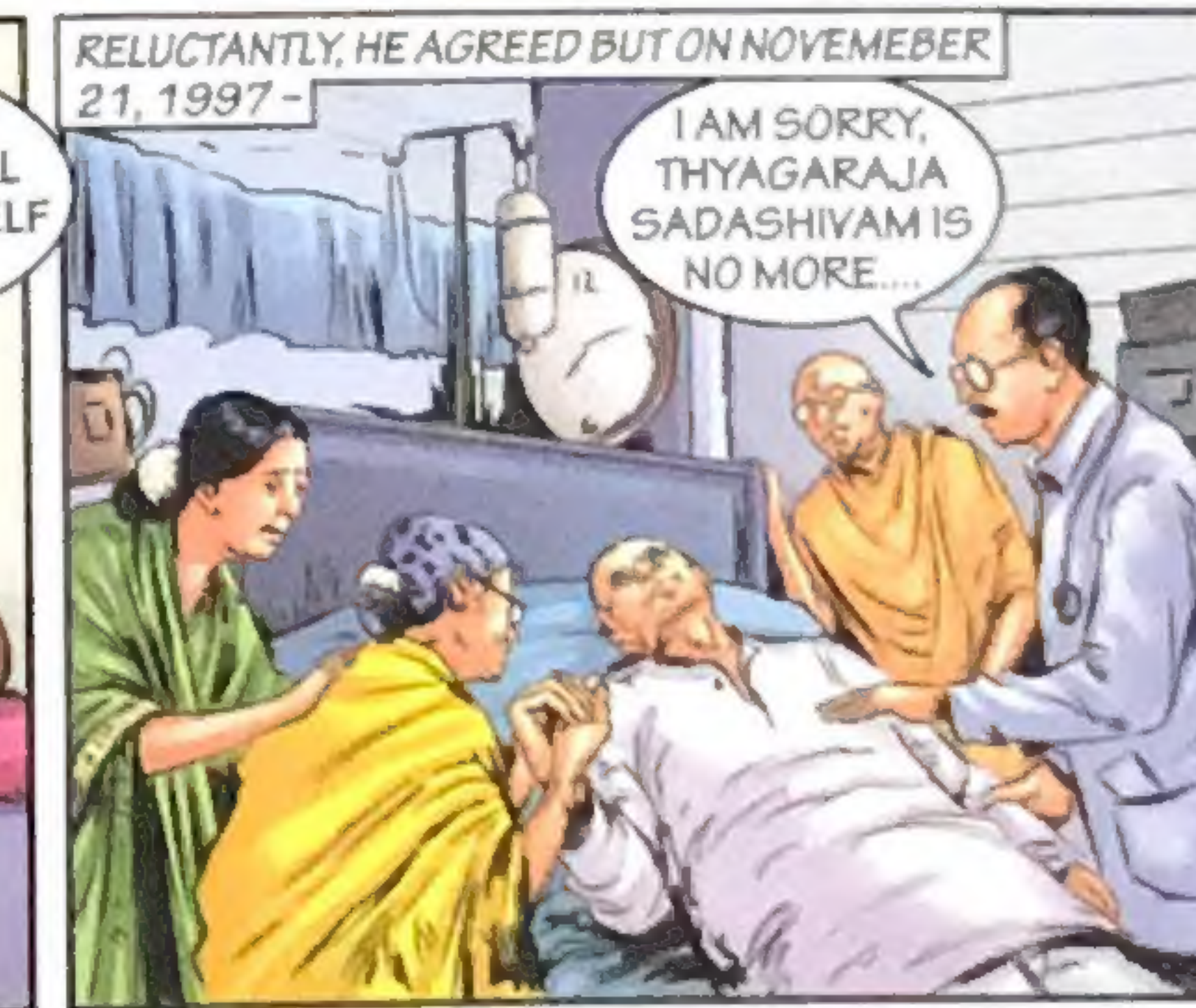
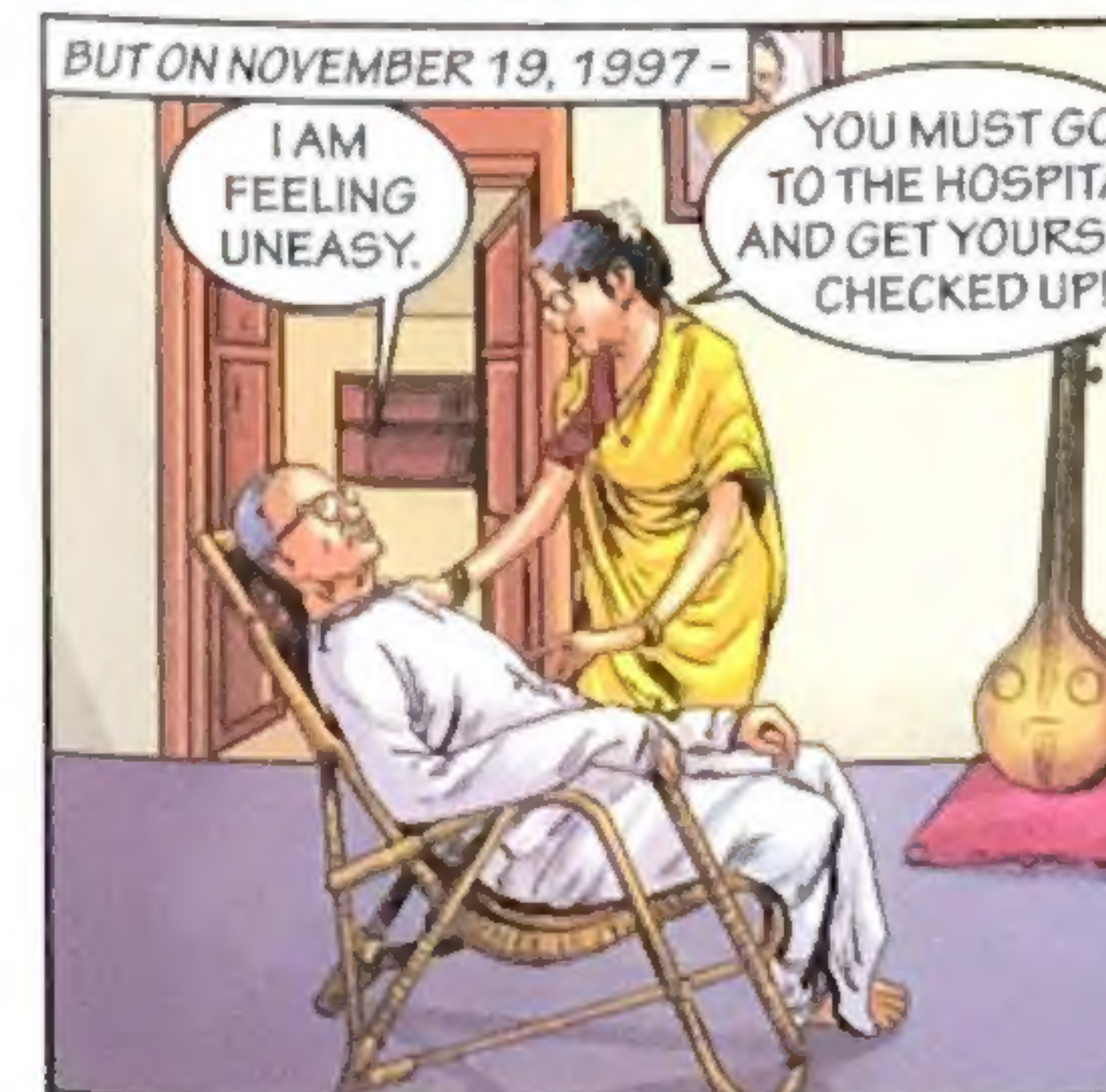
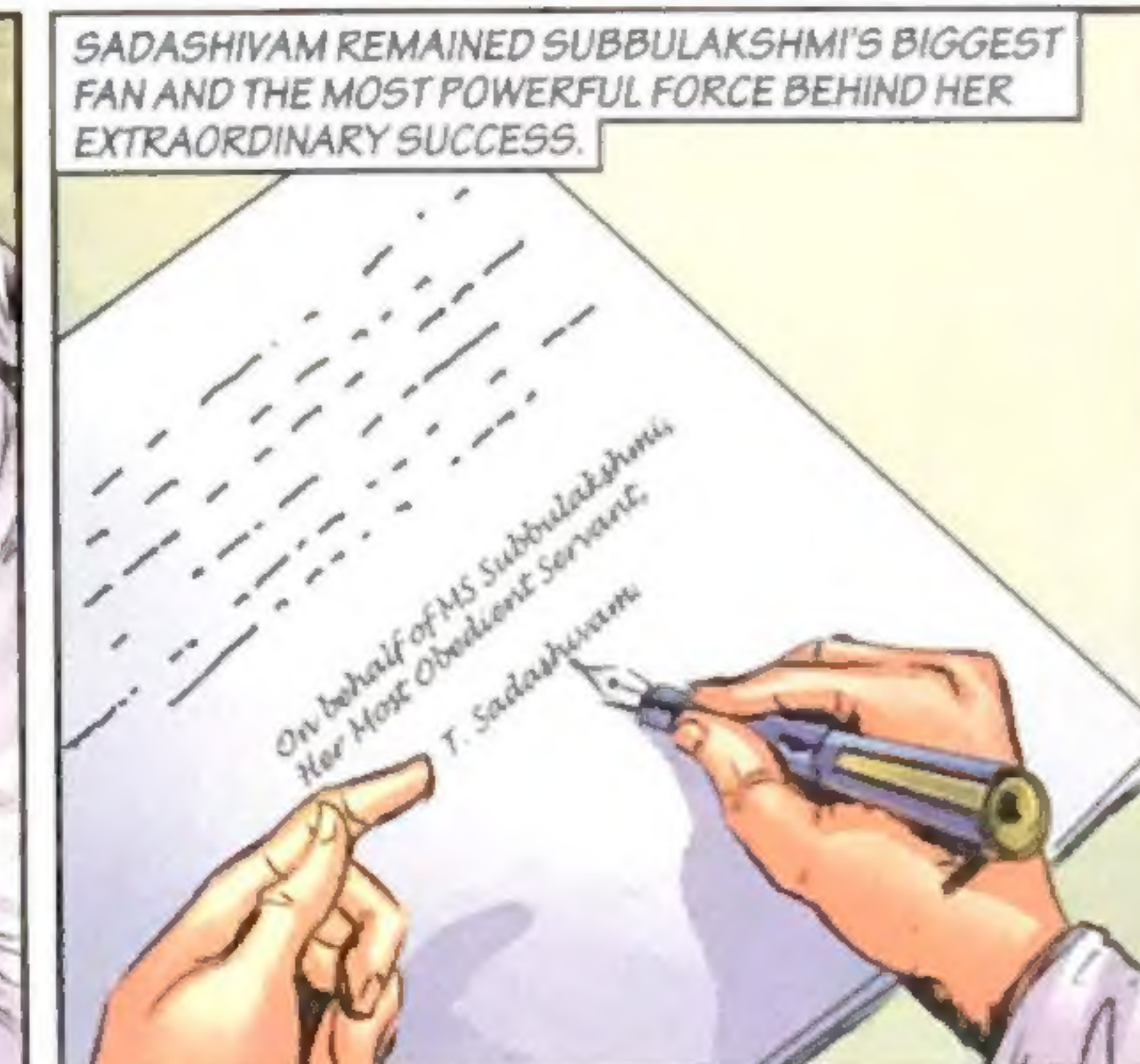
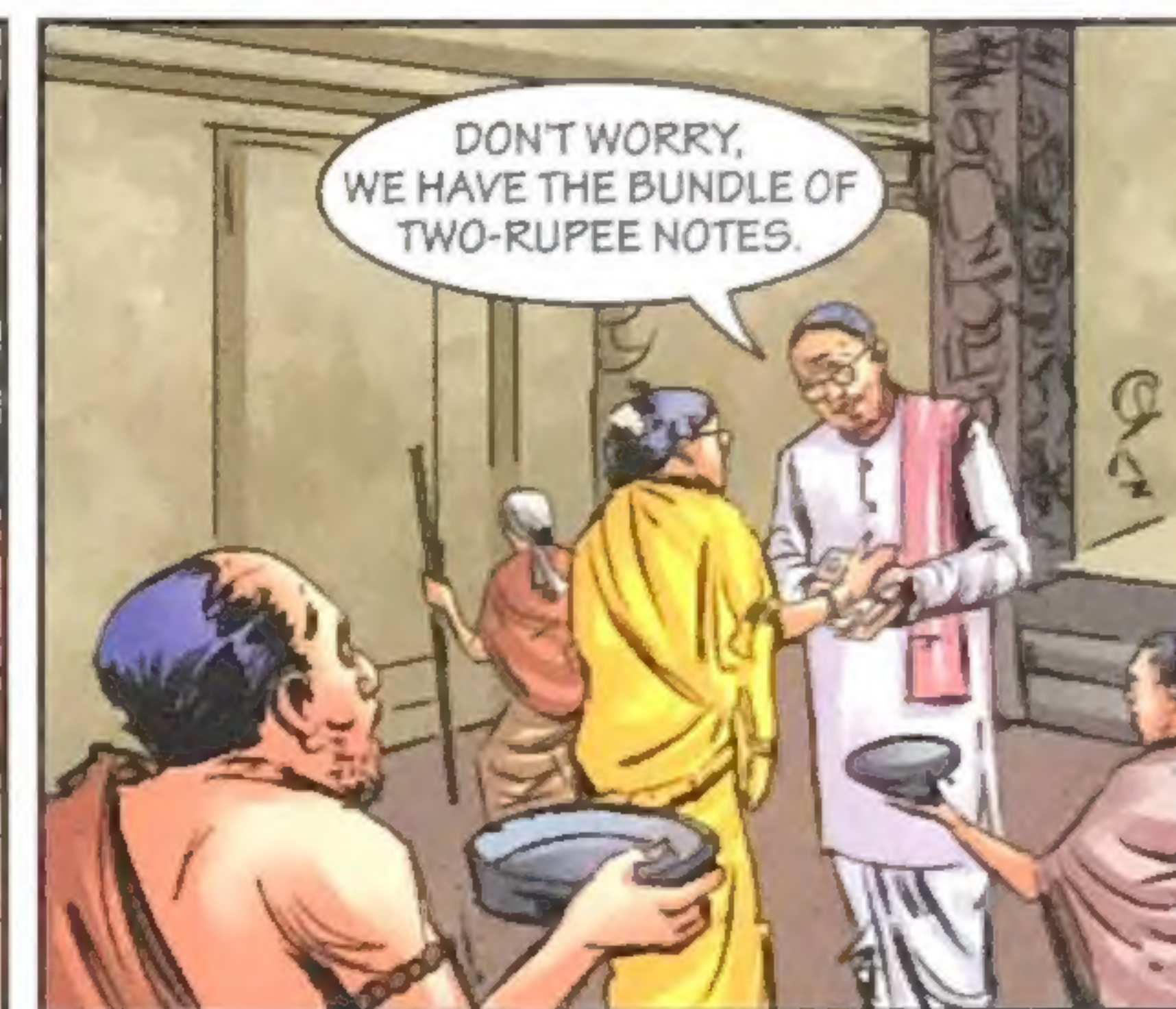
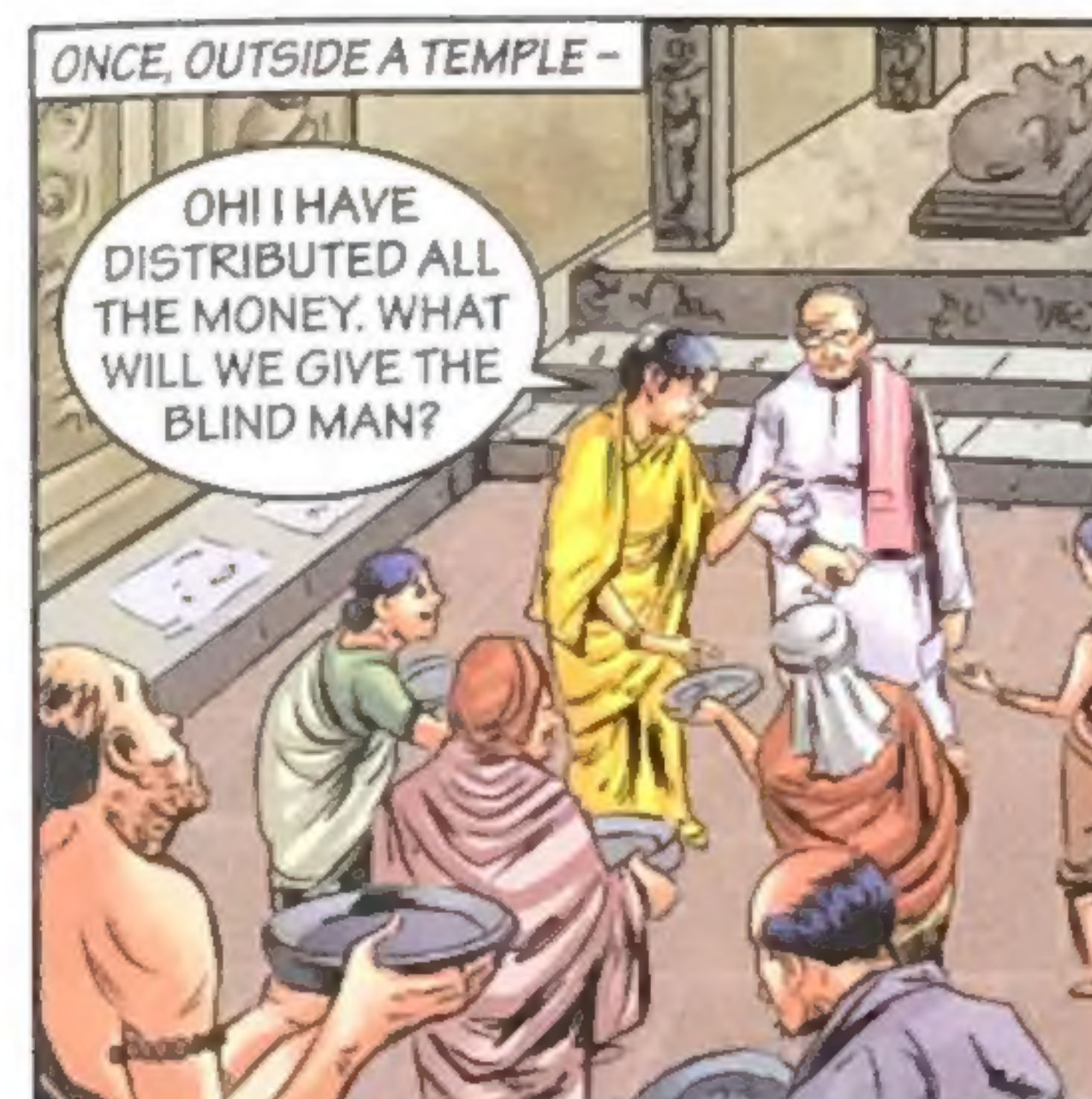




DESPITE SUCCESSES AND ACCOLADES, SADASHIVAM AND SUBBULAKSHMI REMAINED FRUGAL IN THEIR NEEDS, PREFERRED TO DONATE THEIR WEALTH TO CHARITY. ONCE -



\*NOW CALLED KOCHI

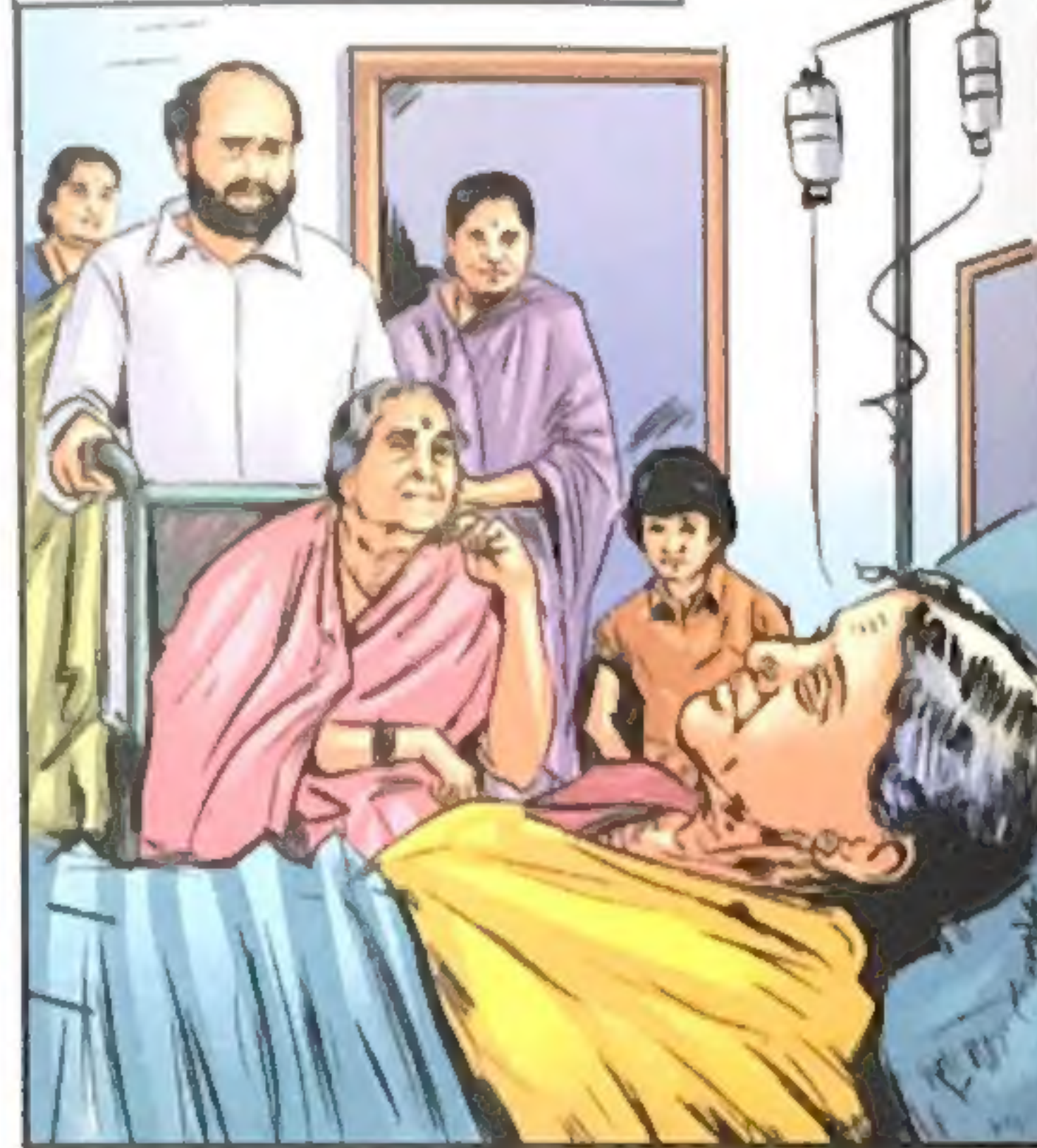




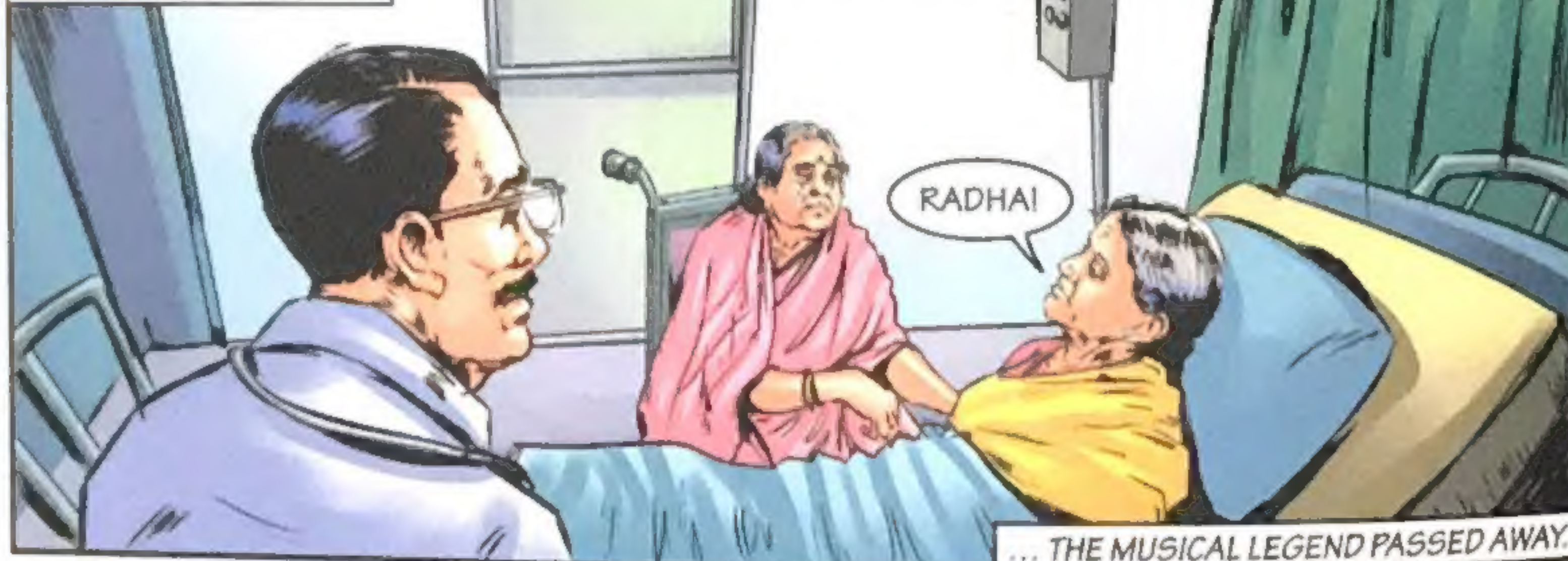
AFTER SADASHIVAM'S DEATH, SUBBULAKSHMI SEEMED TO LOSE HER SPIRIT. SHE STOPPED SINGING AND ALSO MEETING PEOPLE.



ON DECEMBER 2, 2004, SHE WAS ADMITTED TO THE HOSPITAL FOR PNEUMONIA.



ON DECEMBER 11, 2004...



... THE MUSICAL LEGEND PASSED AWAY.

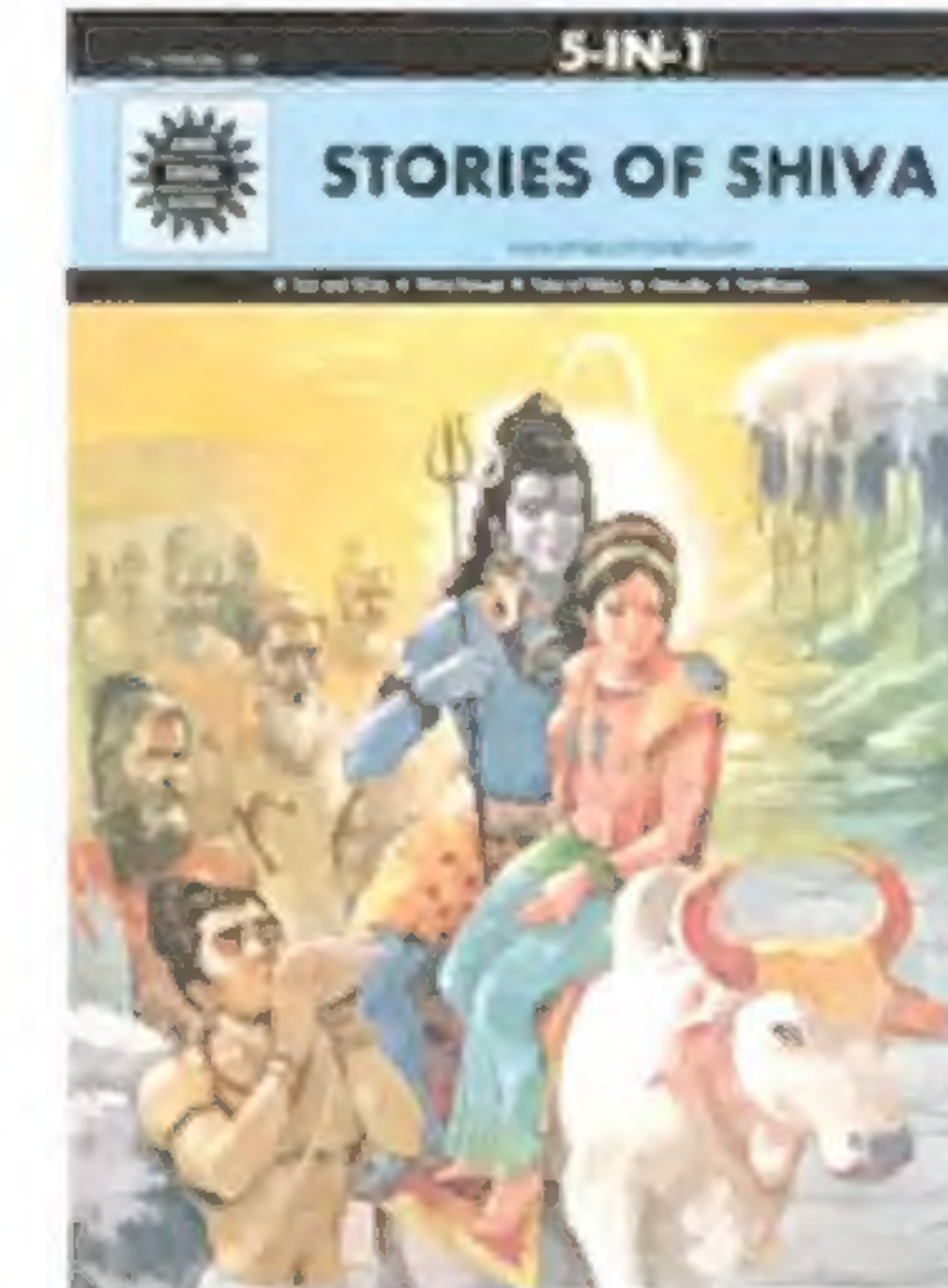
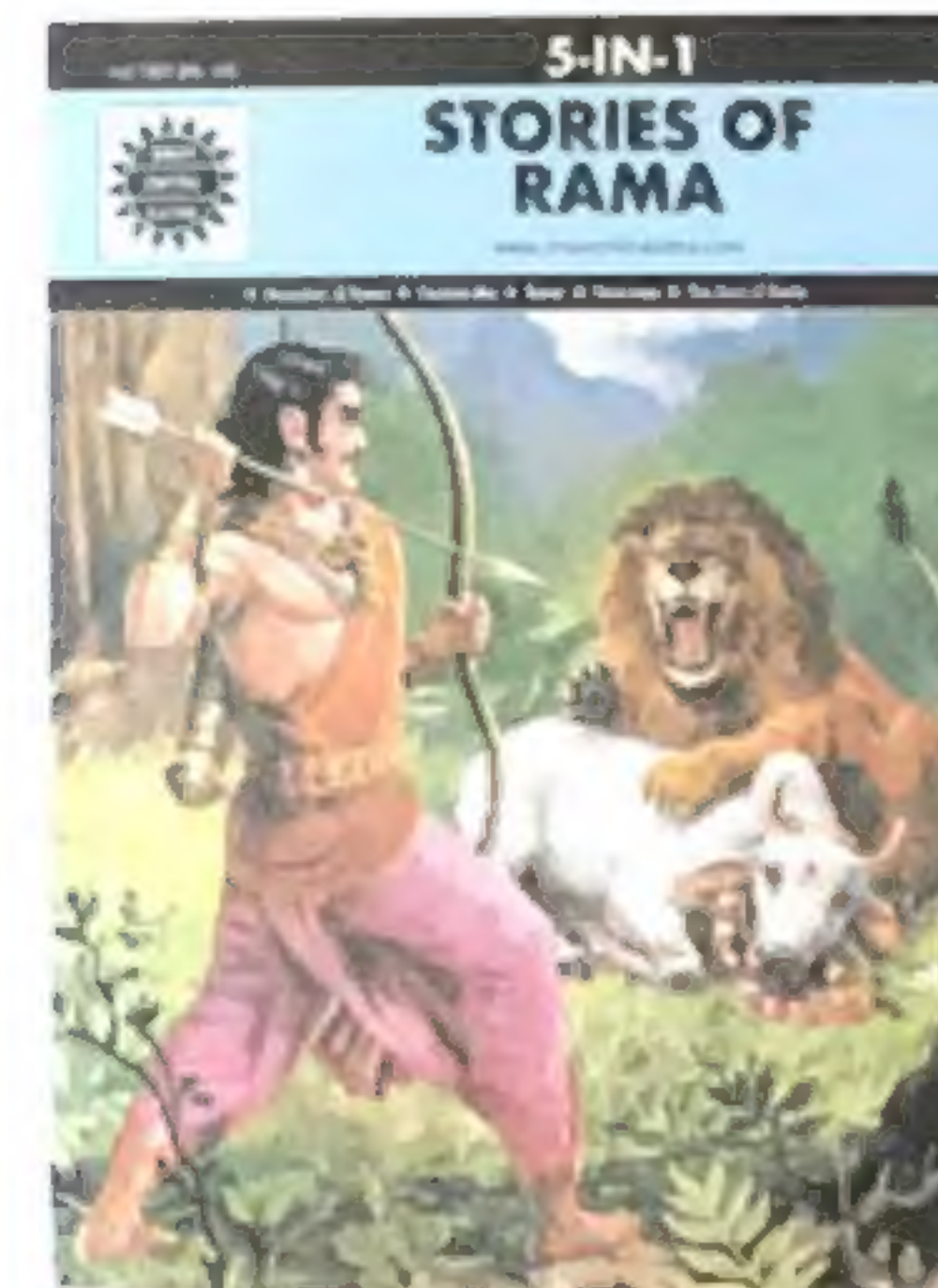
M.S. SUBBULAKSHMI LIVES ON THROUGH HER MUSIC - A SPARKLING LEGACY THAT CONTINUES TO ENTHRALL WITH ITS PURITY AND DEVOTION.



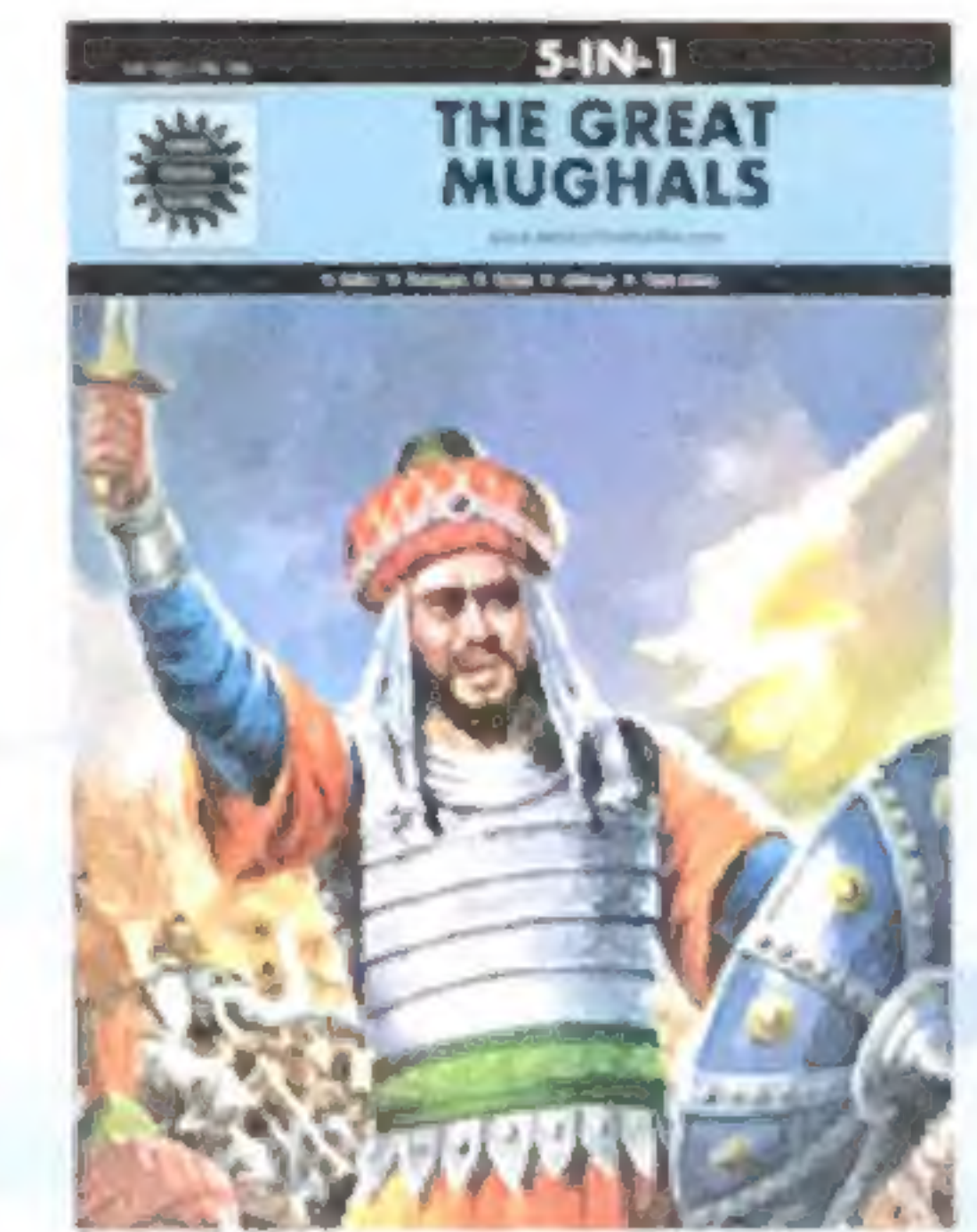
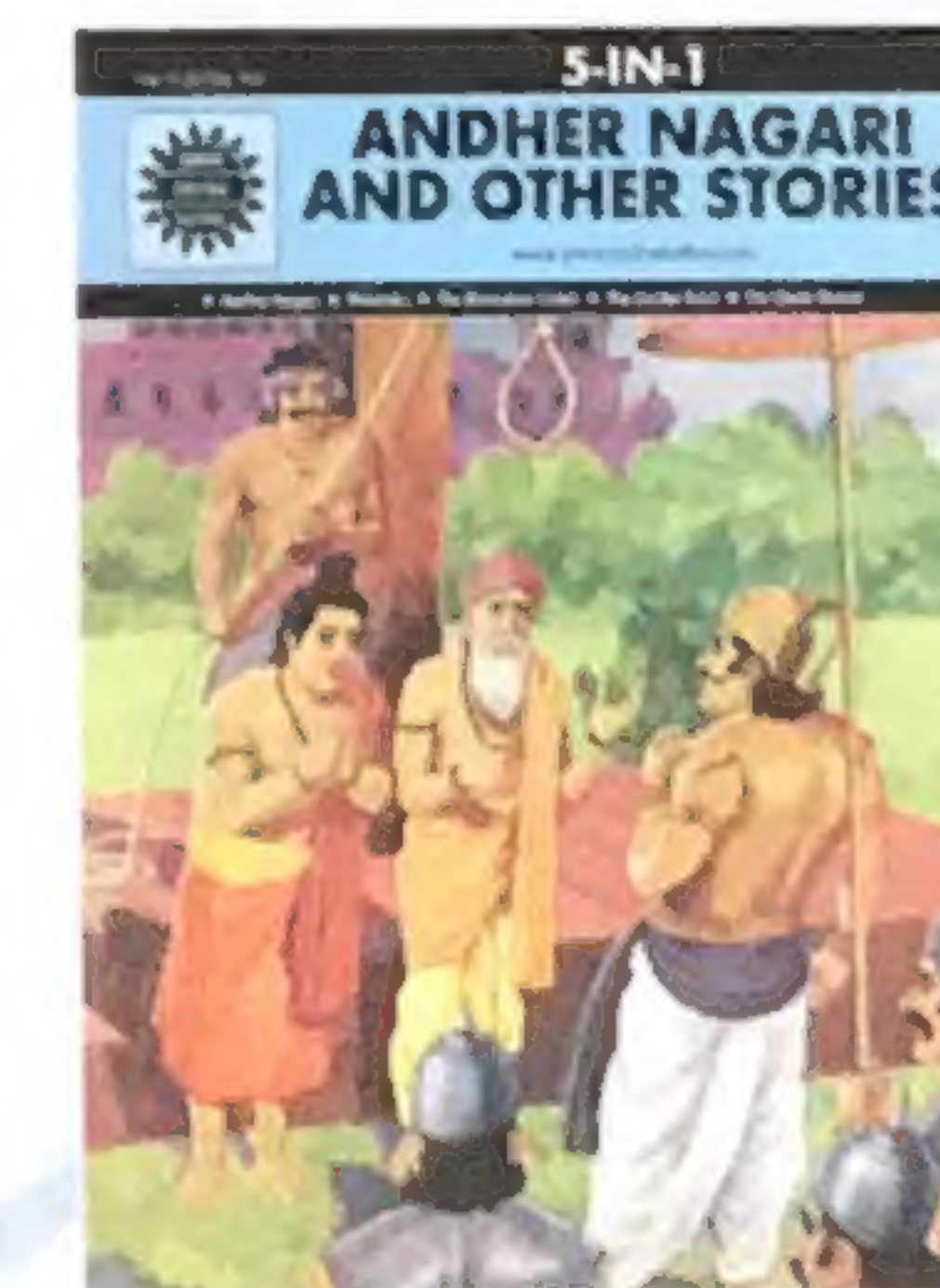
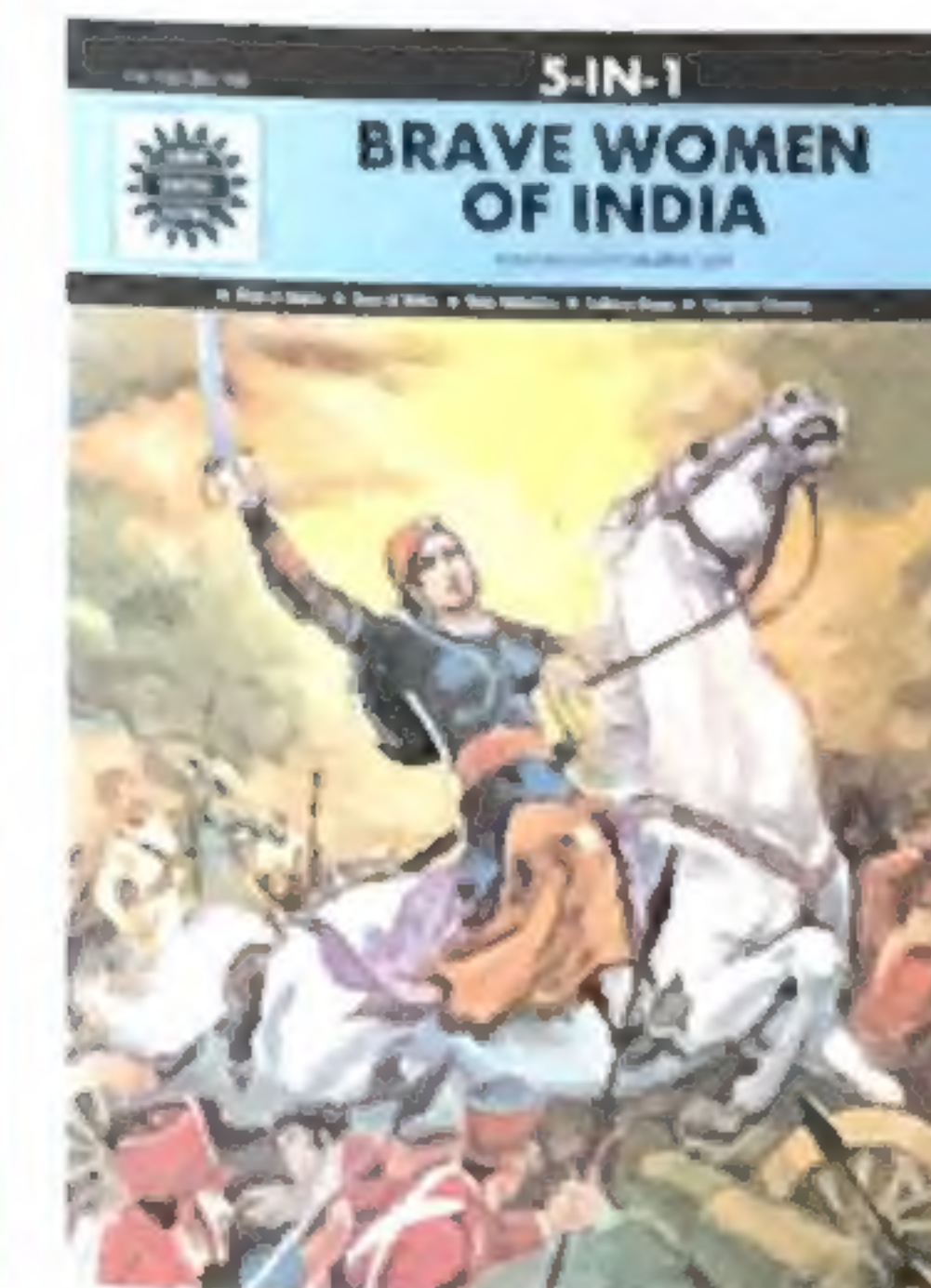
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